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THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

BARRILI.

Authorised Translation from the Italian.

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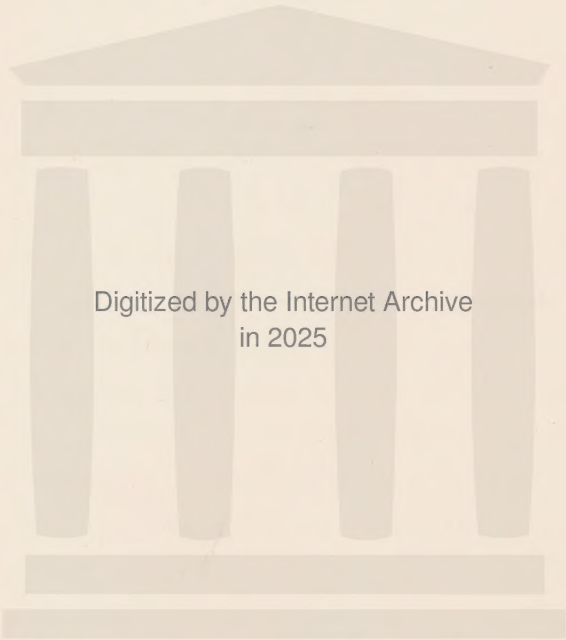
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THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

CHAPTER I.

The monks of San Bruno were all seated in their wooden stalls. The prior must again have given Father Restituto leave to speak, for he began just at that moment.

"Brothers, I will explain myself in a few words. What is our aim in living together in this convent? Is it not to be away from the world and its vexations? In order to know what certain troubles are, one must have experienced them; to desire not to experience them any more one must have been deeply wounded. Well then, gentlemen, if the greatest of human afflictions is love, and woman is the cause of this torment, it seems to me that the deduction from this

reasoning is, that we of the convent of San Bruno have wholly repudiated women."

"We will have no women!" cried Fathers Agapito, Costanzo, and Ilarione unanimously. The prior smiled at that triple unison.

"Continue," he said.

"I have nearly finished," replied Father Restituto. "We will have no women, and meanwhile there is a woman in the convent. And what is worse, not as a visitor, which might be tolerated for a day, but as a tempter."

"Oh!" cried several, starting from their wooden seats.

"It is true," resumed the orator; "did not the devil one day take the form of a hermit!"

"When he became old," said a voice.

"Ah, excuse me," replied Father Restituto, "he is so old now that he can never have been more so. And he is in this house, gentlemen, and under a monk's tunic. His name—do you wish to know his name?"

"What a wonderful discovery!" exclaimed Father Anselmo, laughing. "Friend Restituto, you take the youngest, fairest, most charming amongst us and suddenly make of him a woman. Be careful, however, he is absent, and we must not speak evil of those who are absent."

"I have not spoken evil of him," exclaimed Father Restituto, "and you have quite misunderstood me."

"You have spoken of the devil under the form of a tempter, and that seems to me sufficient."

The dispute threatened to become serious, therefore the prior considered it necessary to interfere.

"Brothers, I beseech you, let us leave this discussion about trifles. You, Father Anselmo, do not interrupt the speaker, and allow him to say all he wishes. Father Restituto, on his side, never meant to give the word 'tempter' an injurious signifi-

cation. There are also involuntary temptations," added Father Anacleto with quiet humour, "and here we have a case in point."

"I thank our worthy prior for his interpretation, which perfectly answers to my conception," said Father Restituto, bowing. "And I add that these temptations—innocent in one way, are not less dangerous in another. Indeed, we should be quite without justification if, aware of the peril, we did not hasten to provide for it. I ask the prior, then, a very simple thing; let him call little Father Adelindo, let him be told what we think of him, and let him be sent home with all the respect due to a woman."

"Do you demand it seriously?" cried the prior, interrupting the murmurings which Father Restituto's proposal had aroused. "I will never do such a thing. I would rather give up my office. Brothers, let us be calm, and consider the matter attentively. It is a grave one, but by no means new. History

abounds with instances of women in man's disguise, who lived quietly and decorously in the midst of men. I could cite a venerable example, but will not do so because the fact is still a matter of controversy, and this is neither the time nor the place to broach a question of papal history. I will speak to you rather of modern armies, in which it was not rare to find women accoutered as men, who knew how to accustom themselves to all the discomforts and all the dangers of war, nobly doing their duty and even deserving to be decorated with the order of the day, for some remarkable enterprise. Who, suspecting their sex, would ever have thought of expelling them from the regiment? Pray let us be just; are we permitted to expel from our peaceful ranks a brother so quiet and amiable as little Father Adelindo? He is not a little father, I understand this; he might be better in a convent of nuns. I also thought so from the first day he came to us."

"Ah, you knew it?" interrupted Father Restituto; "and how, then—"

Father Anacleto interrupted in his turn.

"I did not know it," he said. "The suspicion that the youth might be a woman presented itself to my mind; but he was accompanied by his old uncle whom we have received with him, and I thought that to enter into a joke of this nature the man must have had either too much boldness or"—

"Too much simplicity do you not mean?" asked Father Restituto.

"Pray let us respect the absent, I only wish to say: or too much confidence in our—goodness. Therefore I put away the suspicion, and said to myself: 'There are surely some young people's faces which might deceive us, especially those who are fair, and in whom the down on the cheeks shows itself rather late.' Besides, was it creditable that a girl should be prepared so easily to sacrifice her beautiful golden tresses for the mania of

entering a convent of monks, even supposing they were only pretended monks? And for what reason? I quite understand that one might ask the same question concerning a young man. But, indeed, it is possible that some small trouble, believed to be eternal, and the example of a near relation, might lead to this extreme. Influenced by these considerations, respecting the young man's firm will, and yielding to his ardent wish, I accepted him, though I had little faith in the seriousness of his vocation; enjoining, however, as his and our safeguard, the condition of novice on both him and his uncle. Thus acting, gentlemen, I set my scruples at rest and secured the dignity of the convent, and I thought I had done right."

Father Restituto did not give in.

"You speak of the first day," he said; "that is all very well. But subsequently? Did not the suspicion return that the youth was a woman?"

"More than that, it became certainty," answered Father Anacleto. "You will ask how and why. I can hardly tell you exactly. Perhaps I was influenced by the observation of a physiological fact, at first unperceived. In man, before the soft down on his face appears, we still see a boy with his petulance, if you like, but with equal childishness in thought and deed. Now, without a sign of down on his cheeks, little Father Adelindo is already full of vivacity; there is a natural charm about him beyond young men of his age, and a gravity which they only acquire later, and combined with melancholy and bad temper. No, he is not a man, I said to myself the third day after his entrance into the convent."

"And you said nothing?"

"I said nothing."

"But why, pray why?"

"Because, gentlemen— But am I to tell you everything from beginning to end?"

"Yes, tell us everything!" exclaimed the whole chapter unanimously.

"Because, gentlemen," resumed Father Anacleto, "people would have said that we are not true knights, or that we are not sure of ourselves. Do you not think they would have said so? Confess at least that they might have said so, and this is more than enough to determine a gentleman's mode of action. And truly we should not have been knights if that woman, who has thus confided in the protection of our honour, could have been in any danger. We should have shown that we are not sure of ourselves if, before receiving or expelling her, we could have thought that she might make us lose the few brains which the storms of life have left intact. Tried men, indeed, these monks of San Bruno, if they had said to a fair youth craving admission, accepting also the condition of a novice; 'we believe you to be a woman, and excuse us, but we are afraid of you.'"

"True, very true!" cried Father Anselmo.

"Quite true!" affirmed Father Bonaventura.

A murmur of approbation greeted Father Anacleto's words, and supported the applauders' exclamations. It will be understood, however, that the four in opposition did not join in these marks of sympathy.

"Noble sentiments, nobly expressed," observed Father Restituto, who spoke for all his companions in resistance. "But, really, what our good prior has done, though meaning well, is contrary to the statutes of the order."

"Statutes that were never written," remarked Father Anselmo.

"And to which no one has been called upon to subscribe," added Father Bonaventura.

"You are right, gentlemen," replied Father Restituto, "you are right, if you keep to the

letter, and take no heed of the spirit. There is no letter in our case; but the spirit is there, which has revealed itself in our customs and in that same principle which has already gathered together sixteen men in the convent of San Bruno."

"*Ex ore tuo te judico!*" exclaimed Father Bonaventura. "You do not wish Father Adelindo to be in the community, and yet you reckon him among those present."

"Good heavens! Then we will not count him, and say fifteen. We might even make it fourteen, leaving out the uncle also, who seems to me quite out of his element. There still remain fourteen men, assembled here to live in peace, out of reach of the world's tempests. We are the wise men of whom Lucretius speaks, who stand on the shore contemplating the base forms of others."

"*Suave mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis.*

"*Eterra magnum alterius spectare laborem.*

"You see, Father Bonaventura, that I also can speak Latin, when needful."

"The quotation is essentially egotistical," retorted Father Bonaventura.

"Bravo! And what are we doing, if not an act of egotism? Conscious egotism, rational egotism, which does not go so far as to rejoice over the death of others, but which stops at the consolation of withdrawing ourselves from the crowd whence there is no possibility or hope of withdrawing others also. Scornful isolation or benevolent contempt according to our disposition, is all that remains to us in an ill-organised society. Thus I understand it; neither do I think that hitherto you have understood it otherwise. And in this solitude, of which the first plan and claim to merit honours our esteemed prior, in this solitude we were very happy; we could be equally so in the future, but on condition of remaining as we were at the

beginning. Remove from here all heterogeneous elements, those elements which we have shunned to obtain peace. A woman in the convent of San Bruno is a subject of discord; a temptation, involuntary as long as you will, as innocent as you like, but still a temptation."

Thus spoke Father Restituto, with an air of profound conviction. But the prior, who, through his olympian calmness attained more elevated regions, thus promptly made answer—

"Leave this temptation alone, let it put us to the test. Temptation overcome has done honour to the saints; it has also been the cause of their elevation to celestial seats. Remember, friend Restituto, remember Antony at Thebes. The good hermit remained in his cave, contemplating the evil spirit's ever new inventions, and not once was his blood stirred, or did his heart beat quicker. Saint Antony was a man! For

him, beauty had no seductions, human greatness offered no attractions. More illustrious than Saint Hubert, who was fond of hunting and good hounds, Saint Antony centered his affections in a— how shall I say it decently? Let us call it, my brothers, a domestic boar. Saint Antony possessed the vocation of all the highest renunciations. We will leave the domestic boar alone, for really that is going a little too far; but let us imitate Saint Antony in the calm courage of his moral victories. The vocation of the desert can only be proved in danger. Let us thank fate, which has given us this opportunity of confronting a danger in order that we may triumph over it. Verily it would be strange if we, men tried in the fire of passion, should to-day succumb disgracefully! It would be strange, gentlemen, if the second vocation were not sufficient, and that a third were proved to be necessary for us."

A cry of admiration greeted the close of

this discourse. A fine speech, my readers, which I have abbreviated, despairing to convey to you all its sarcastic energy.

"Grand!" exclaimed Father Anselmo.

"Divine!" added Father Bonaventura.

"Wonderful!" affirmed Father Atanasio.

Overwhelmed by the prior's reasoning, oppressed by the enthusiastic cries of the audience, Father Restituto did not know how to recover himself.

Father Anacleto profited by his adversary's silence to make a diversion after the manner of the one which rendered Scipio Africans famous in his pompous orations.

"Let us change the subject," he said after a moment's pause. "How are the scientific articles for the new journal progressing? You, Father Bonaventura, must have finished your studies on the falling stars. How far are you advanced? Do you still consider Schiaparelli's theory as true as before?"

"Alas!" exclaimed Father Bonaventura

ingenuously, "I understand nothing more since that bolide appeared on the San Bruno horizon."

"That is bad," observed the prior, not knowing whether to laugh or be angry. "You, at least, Father Atanasio, will have put the finishing touches to your scientific minutes?"

"Good God!" answered Father Atanasio, shaking his head sadly. "What is to be done with so much electricity in the air?"

The prior knitted his brow. What result would he have obtained from his speech if his most faithful adherents showed that they yielded so easily to temptation?

"I see," he said, "I see the journal will not be continued."

"It is still-born," added Father Restituto.

At this unpalatable observation Father Tranquillo bounded like a spring.

"And why pray? Wait till it has been brought to light to make your *post-mortem*

registry. Meanwhile, I have the honour of informing you that there is a way of bringing it into the world alive."

"Ah, heaven be praised!" exclaimed the prior. "You, Father Tranquillo, reassure us concerning the good progress of your paper on the circulation of the blood."

"This has been finished some time," answered Father Tranquillo. "But I do not intend to speak here of my work. I say rather the blood may circulate freely in the arteries of the new born, if we know how to introduce into it some new element, before it is too late."

"Explain your meaning."

"Directly. In the new journal there must also be something attractive; for example a little literature in the shape of a novel, or a poetical composition."

"Of course, to please the little father!"

put in Father Agapito, in a sarcastic tone, supported by an encouraging glance from Father Restituto.

"Little father or no, a journal must be a journal" replied Father Tranquillo. "We do not want to make a dry report about the *acts* of this or that scientific society! That is really the kind which has been condemned, and several societies have understood it so well that they already aim at a little variety in their publications. Look for instance, at the *Journal Asiatique*. It is full of oriental philology, yet in every number you meet with many subjects, Indian algebra, Babylonian demonology, Arabic medicine, Assyrian poetry, Persian fables and so forth. An archaeological journal also should be compiled in such a way as not to be dull. Are you not fond of Latin quotations Father Restituto. Here is one from Horace:—*Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*. In short, ought a journal to be a pattern of life or not?"

"Of ours, certainly;" observed the prior. "And if ours is a studious life it will suffice that our journal be one of studies."

Father Tranquillo, seeing that he was abandoned by the prior to whose assistance he thought he had come, answered nothing. But Father Natale spoke for him.

"A journal," he said "must serve for some purpose. To be a journal or not, that is the point. In other words, a journal must resemble man; either be of some use like him or else not exist."

"Like man!" exclaimed the prior, raising his eyebrows. "Father Natale, your words have a deeper meaning than is apparent. If you think man is forced to do something for others, find out how he succeeds. Return to the world!"

Father Natale muttered something between his teeth, but did not deem it advisable to let his colleagues hear it.

"That little vixen has bewitched us all," thought Father Anacleto.

Then turning to his companions, he continued: "Gentlemen, brethren, I see too well that you do not agree. I do not think there is anything to put to the vote, because you yourselves do not seem to be sufficiently sure of what you would have. I will, therefore, make you a proposal which I have been thinking of since the beginning of this discussion. Elect another prior. He will be able to make a new rule; either stricter as Father Restituto desires or more lax as Father Natale wishes. You will do as you think best and for me, it will be all the same, for I wash my hands of it."

A confused murmur of voices greeted the prior's outburst.

"What humility!" cried Father Restituto.

"What courtesy!" cried Father Natale.

"He is right, you are exorbitant in your claims."

"There are none; there are the statutes."

"There are no statues; but customs."

"What customs! Nonsense; the assembly is supreme."

"Do you know what I have to tell you?" thundered forth the prior, overruling that infernal noise for a moment. "The end of it is that we are all a pack of fools."

"So it has been rumoured for some time," observed Father Marcellino who till then had not spoken a word.

The assembly burst out laughing. It was nothing to boast of, I confess; but is it my fault if Father Marcellino's remark cut short the quarrel and made that grave assembly explode with laughter? It is not only yawning which is contagious; laughter also, opportunely provoked, tickles the most hardened liver in the world. Just fancy! Even Father Anacleto could not help laughing in spite of all the grave thoughts which agitated him. When this burst of hilarity had subsided, Father Atanasio spoke as follows:—

"Have patience, prior, and sympathise with our folly. There is a great deal of electricity in the air, as I told you! It will discharge itself when and as it can. In the meanwhile shall we postpone our decision—what do you say?"

"We will postpone it!" cried Father Anselmo.

"Yes, yes, we will postpone it!" cried Father Bonaventuro, while the majority of the others echoed this sentiment.

"So be it. Although postponing the decision leaves your prior in a very awkward situation, however, we will postpone it," said Father Anacleto. "But remember gentlemen, on one condition. We are knights. In an age like the present, it is after all, good for one's health and a moral consolation to know that the world inclines to selfishness and ill-breeding. Gentlemen, we are knights and our novices, whether they be men or women, must not have an idea of our suspicions."

"We will do our duty," answered Father Agapito in the name of the dissidents.

The fair-haired seraph did not wait to hear more. Hardly had he perceived a movement in some of the stalls than he raised his head, jumped up and ran softly to the staircase. In another minute he was in the church.

Uncle Prospero was sleeping comfortably in his arm-chair with an open book on his knees. The fair-haired seraph did not even stop to see what book it was but went out, turning his steps away from the convent. But he did not walk far out of doors; when he reached the avenue of ash trees which began just where the courtyard ended, he turned back like a person who is tired and has taken a long walk. It then happened that some of the monks, who had gone out to get some fresh air under the convent portico, saw him issuing from the avenue.

"*Caussa mali tanti!*" whispered Father Tranquillo to Father Restituto.

"Ah! You admit then that he is a woman," answered Father Restituto. "The pentameter must be concluded: *foemina sola fuit.*"

"Excuse me," replied Father Tranquillo. "I have quoted just as much as applied to my case. It is always thus with quotations. However, I do not believe it is a woman. That is my opinion!"

"It cannot be the prior's," retorted Father Resitituto. "Look, there he is going out of the portico. You will see that he goes to meet the little father—to pay his addresses to him."

The prior did not act as Father Restituto anticipated. He had quitted the portico as if to make room for five or six other monks who followed him. Perhaps then, looking towards the wood he perceived Father Adelindo and thought to avoid the meeting,

for instead of going on he turned to the left along the wall of the church, whence he reached a bastion which rose perpendicularly from the edge of the torrent whose bubbling could be heard in the depth of the valley close by. Arrived there he seated himself on the parapet, turning his back on the convent, as if he wished to be alone with his thoughts and did not care to trouble himself with what his companions were saying or doing.

"I do not think you will prove right," whispered Father Tranquillo to Father Restituto.

" Diplomacy ! diplomacy ! " answered Father Restituto, shaking his head like a man who knows a great deal. " These artifices are well known. However, if the prior has not gone to meet the little father, the little father may yet go to meet the prior."

Neither in this case did Father Restituto prove right. Little Father Adelindo was coming towards the portico, with his angelic

little face, a charming colour in his cheeks, sign of a quick walk in the open air, and with a smile on his lips, evidence of his adorable candour.

Having reached the portico, without even casting a glance on the side of the bastion, he greeted both Father Restituto and Father Tranquillo with a slight bow, and went up to Father Agapito, who was standing rather behind.

"Brother," he said, "would you do me a favour?"

"Two if I can," answered Father Agapito, bowing in spite of himself.

"I should like to know where my uncle has gone. I have sought for him all through the wood in vain."

"He will be in his cell I should think."

"No, he was not there, and that is just the reason I went to look for him out of doors."

"Have you looked in the library?"

"Ah yes, of course!" exclaimed the seraph, laughing. "The only place I have not been to! But he cares so little about reading that really it never entered my head to look for him there. And so," he added, to induce Father Agapito to accompany him, "you have held your meeting?"

"Yes," said Father Agapito.

The seraph heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"What a pity to be a novice!" he exclaimed. "I should so much have liked to be in chapter!"

"Ah, yes, I daresay," thought Father Agapito.

"And tell me," resumed the seraph, with his wonted ingenuousness, "not from a wish to learn your secrets, but from affection for the order, have you come to a decision?"

"Yes and no," answered Father Agapito, who was on thorns. "There was a discussion about the journal."

"Ah, I thought so!" cried the seraph.

"Then is that poor journal doomed? Will my drawings be useless?"

"No, do not be afraid. The journal will be compiled, only—I tell you in confidence—"

The ingenuous little monk placed his hand on his heart, and gave Father Agapito a glance which went straight through his heart.

"Only," continued Father Agapito, "they wish to make it more attractive, to give it a more literary tone, make it more varied by inserting novels, verses, I don't know what—"

"Ah yes, capital, some verses!" exclaimed the seraph, clapping his hands. "I am so fond of them! Are you a poet, Father Agapito? Your pensive expression makes me think you are."

"Oh, once—in times past—" stammered Father Agapito. "You are too good."

"At least you will remember some of

them. You will recite some to me, will you not?"

Father Agapito was too confused to reply, but he bowed in sign of assent.

That day, when alone in his cell, Father Agapito looked at himself in the glass.

"It is true," he said to himself; "I have a pensive expression. The little father is observant."

CHAPTER II.

Meanwhile, what was Father Anacleto, prior of the recluses of San Bruno, thinking about? The sad thought flashed across his mind that he had calculated ill, that he had been dragging on a wearisome problem from stage to stage without taking into account an essential element whose presence at first unperceived was undermining the whole of his numerical edifice.

But why was he pondering over mistaken reckonings? Was it not possible that he attached too much importance to an element, certainly troublesome, more troublesome than flies in summer, but decidedly not essential to existence? One flower does not make spring, and a little dispute between the monks was not to be looked upon as the end of the world. Doubtless that difference

would be healed; it was neither possible nor credible that fourteen reasonable persons should be at their wits' end because a woman had entered the convent. Father Anacleto had from the first suspected that a woman was concealed under the guise of Prospero Gentili's nephew; then he became certain of it, but took no heed of the fact and the consequences it might bring on them. With all his talent Father Anacleto was very simple minded.

And do not be surprised at this. Man's penetration is more often than not only the result of a bad disposition. We do not guess at the worst; we think of it, hoping and feeling certain that we have guessed the truth. Man is thus constituted; he thinks evil from habit; he seeks it from inclination. There are persons who hunt for scorpions wherewith to make that healing oil you know of, and there are persons who grope here and there in quest of bad interpretations which

are to do honour to their perspicacity. See what a clever man! How acute he is! Before even noticing the worm he exclaimed, 'There is the maggot.' Father Anacleto was differently constituted; indeed, to tell you in confidence, he had always been a good boy. Life at a certain point had bored him, and he had withdrawn a little on one side, without much anger, or, to speak more correctly, with righteous anger which very soon evaporated. He had no time to hate, and treated his friends with profound indifference—so profound that it seemed to be something more, and led one to think that he held all humanity alike in contempt. But this was quite the reverse of the truth. Father Anacleto did not despise humanity, only he liked to let it alone. He did not trouble it with his philosophy, and only asked in return not to be molested by it.

"I am tired of the world," the prior used to say, when asked the reason of his with-

drawal into the desert. "There was nothing useful to be done, so I packed up and came here. Still young, you say. What does that matter? Ought I to have waited till I was old to open my eyes? And is it not better for a man to acquire experience ten or twenty years before the usual time?"

The idea of seeking solitude had come to him suddenly, but the psychological motives for doing so were still a long way off. There is, however, in everybody an ancient inclination to restricted society, and in this matter children are worthy of observation, who with chairs and stools make a little enclosure in the corner of a room—a house within a house so to speak—and shut themselves up in it when the rain beats on the windows. They would not get wet if they remained in the room; but no, they must shelter themselves more completely, shut themselves up in a corner, and in a house made by their own hands. Every man instinctively shuts

himself up, and he who lives in public, like him who thinks out loud, sooner or later repents of it.

The future Father Anacleto had therefore seen great advantage in a house made by himself, in an artificial family life of which military service had shown him one example, and he had seen another in brotherhoods. Like the Knights of Rhodes he had united the two, and found the result to his taste. And just as, at the time of the great dismemberment of the Roman world, some wise souls had one day resorted to the monastic life for shelter, so thought the future Father Anacleto that the shipwrecked by modern life might live together in peace, far from the vain world, to expiate their share of follies and to avoid committing any more.

Monasticism was being abolished as a civil institution; but these were precisely the circumstances in which to re-create it as a personal institution. To live apart, to

abstain from assassinating one's fellow-creatures, as many do under the pretext of doing good, to study, to instil into the mind the love of beautiful things, might still be a wise resource, and not so egotistical as at first sight appeared. At any rate, is it not better to love one's self than to love nobody? A contemplative life which inclines to the *dolce far niente* is better than an active life which leads to doing evil. Besides, what duties do we owe to society? The future Father Anacleto had studied the subject, and could not persuade himself that there were any positive duties. Therefore he considered society like a current, which attracts and carries away by force everything it finds in its course; but it does not carry away or attract him who has succeeded in escaping from it. To suppress attractions, social allurements, that was the first point. It seemed to him that his object might be attained at that period of life in which the

two most powerful allurements have made us suffer most. Shipwrecked by ambition, shipwrecked by love, intelligent men would mutually recognise one another, live together, recover together, find on earth that peace which afflicted souls hope for in heaven.

The first society had come into existence almost simultaneously with the idea, formed by a few friends who had been in the habit of exchanging their thoughts for a long time. But soon the rumour of it was spread abroad, and other companions had offered themselves. The idea was good; the new rule to which chance had given the name of San Bruno, flourished; and Father Anacleto, no longer future, but present, and unanimously elected prior, already aimed at his order achieving new triumphs.

And here, was it not Nature working within him? Nature, that mysterious power which sometimes permits a secret to be torn from her, at other times imposes laws, but in the

long run always has her own way, and renders all the artifices of man vain?

The desire of aggrandizing the new order of San Bruno might be justified by the number of monks, who were already too numerous for the convent; but did it not also show a little of that missionary spirit which is the vanity or the ambition of all men and of all sects? And by looking at his Order seriously, falling in love with his work so far as to found a teaching and rule of life which might yet be understood and permitted as a personal caprice, was not Father Anacleto labouring to bring on himself again some of those troubles which had given him an aversion to the world, and from which he had so anxiously fled?

For the present he already had a sample of the assembly of the chapter. What fools his monks were! They also had thought seriously of their condition. But then, why not welcome a slight temptation? Why not

gladly receive the opportunity of a triumph which would have shown them to be indeed superior men? So thought Father Anacleto and justly. And then such phrases as these escaped his lips: "What a fuss about a girl! If they looked at her with my eyes!"

Apropos, how did he look at her? I should not like the prior to boast ever so little. Let us see then, let us examine *corda et renes*. He liked the fair-haired seraph, there is no denying that he liked him; neither did he conceal the fact from himself, a sign that his sin was one of those which we freely confess to ourselves, because we do not believe it will bring any consequences. He liked the seraph as one likes a fine picture, Raphael's "Transfiguration" for instance, or Domenichino's "Communion of Saint Jerome." We admire, we contemplate rapturously, almost adore, but the sentiment of the beautiful is so pure within us that we have no desire even, to possess that picture; ex-

cept in the case of our being financial princes or brokers; two types which are sometimes found united in the same person. But suppose that by some extraordinary chance that splendid picture belongs to you; and the same sentiment of the beautiful, as profound and as pure within you will be the cause of your inability to part with it at any price. This then, is man's pure and intelligent passion for beauty in all its aspects. And certainly, I admit also that it will be more difficult to feel it in the same purity when beauty is incarnate in a living woman. But after all, with a noble character and a high standard (for love itself is generated by admiration) even so difficult a thing will seem to you possible. And my Father Anacleto will no longer appear so strange. After all, that fair-haired seraph appeared to him as a ray of sunshine in the grey and monotonous sky of San Bruno. That little rosy-cheeked monk resembled a page in some degree, and

it seemed to Father Anacleto that in the convent he formed the same happy contrast that a graceful and amorous page must have done in one of those mediæval courts which were ever menacing and ever menaced, so that it grieves one even to think of them.

And then, it seemed to him, that as a gentleman, he ought not to perceive anything or endeavour to discover anything too positive in his sensations. There was something of the poet in Father Anacleto, and this is perhaps why he was fitted to be prior in a convent of fools.

The assembly of the chapter being terminated in the way already mentioned, our prior hoped his worthy colleagues would not have persevered in their unjust antipathies and silly fears. If the little father had become tired of that secluded life, and had abandoned the convent, would he have adjusted matters? Yes and no. However, the idea of the fair-haired seraph escaping did

not present itself very clearly to the prior's mind. Only those things which we have desired a long time, and wished for intensely, are clearly and vividly defined in our minds. But observe, the idea that his companions would now be silenced was quite clear to him. Why on earth send away a novice who did nobody any harm? Who would ever have the courage to do so if he had not? He who was the most equanimous, the most reserved, the calmest of all of them put together. And meantime he observed a remarkable fact. His old friends, Father Anselmo and Father Bonaventura, his declared partisans and defenders of the seraph in chapter were beginning to change their colours; day by day they became less tender towards their *protégé*; that milk and honey which flowed from their lips in speaking of him were beginning to taste sour. On the other hand, his opponents could not make enough of the little father. Especially,

Father Agapito and Father Restituto had treated the seraph with a courtesy and tenderness which left nothing to be desired. In fact, the prior would have preferred their paying him rather less attention. Why? Perhaps because in his character of prior it was right that he should wish to see justice done to all; perhaps because, as an observer, he had remarked too rapid a change of sentiments and manners; perhaps because—Well you must discover the reason for yourselves.

In the midst of these ups and downs and psychological considerations and low spirits the prior received a visit from the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia. And accompanied by heroic comical circumstances which I shall relate without waiting to be asked. The Sub-Prefect had come on horseback with a couple of Carabineers as escort. Of honour or for protection? Brother Giocondo who did not know him and was on guard at his post, would not permit him to

go up to the convent as he seemed to wish to do.

"Oh, excuse me," he said in a tone half surly half insinuating, which he assumed when he was beginning to lose patience, "if you come to arrest the prior, shew me your warrant and proceed. If you come to pay him a visit, give me your name and wait as others do."

The Sub-Prefect digested this with difficulty, and answered "I will wait." Thus saying our illustrious friend handed his visiting card to the lay brother with a gesture which signified: See who it is you oblige to wait. Go and announce him to your principal, who will abuse you roundly.

But the lay brother did not even glance at the card, or would not give the haughty visitor the consolation of doing so in his presence. Indeed he knew him already, having seen him some days before when he had been to the parlour asking for Father

Prospero and modestly announced himself as "his friend Tiraquelli!" Whoever he was it was all the same to Brother Giocondo, who, card in hand, went to inform the prior of his arrival.

The Cavaliere and Sub-Prefect paced twenty times up and down the parlour which was eight metres and a few centimetres in length and could have been measured without so much fatigue. Then he went into the little courtyard to contemplate the valley and listen to the murmuring of the torrent; then he returned to the parlour and gazed at the ugly countenance of Mastino II. della Scala; several times he compressed his lips and shook his head in sign of impatience; at last he drew a long breath for he heard a hurried step on the pavement of the courtyard, sure indication of the prior's arrival. It was in fact Father Anacleto and the Sub-Prefect soon saw him appear through the crack of the door.

The Sub-Prefect had several times heard of the prior's youth and good looks; but he had never given much heed to people's gossip, thinking that the qualities of mysterious men are always exaggerated, precisely when these qualities seem a contradiction to the kind of life to which these men have devoted themselves. Therefore he must have been amazed to see that man, younger and handsomer than he had condescended to believe and not the least ridiculous in his friar's habit. Father Anacleto displayed in his tunic the same gracefulness with the same consciousness of ease that we meet with in artists, painters and sculptors when they appear before us in certain scarfs, doublets and velvet-caps which look as if they had come out of a fifteenth century picture.

Father Anacleto, to describe him in an ancient French phrase, had a fine Italian head. Therefore you must picture to yourself at once, large, deep-set eyes, with black pupils

circumfused by a bluish light, long eyelashes, a delicate complexion, proud features, together with a fine beard and beautiful glossy and wavy hair. His countenance expressed the honest pride of a man young and strong; his eyes the nobility of mind which can raise itself by its inherent virtue and will not be assisted by anyone.

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia did not pause to observe particularly all the details I have described to you. He took him as a whole, so to speak, and without however meaning to do so, compared that type of masculine beauty with the Duke of Francavilla's silly, washed out face. He also was a handsome young man (who says the contrary?) but he must be seen without rivals.

Little, in fact not at all pleased with the result of his examination, the Sub-Prefect prepared to answer Father Anacleto's first words with a bow. The prior had entered,

visiting card in hand and had given it another glance before pronouncing the words :—

"Signor—Commendatore—" The word was justified by the glance. On the little piece of Bristol pasteboard which the visitor had given to Brother Giocondo, was written precisely this :—"*C.avv. Eudossio Tiraquelli, Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia!*" But what in the world did that *C.* mean? Cavaliere or Commendatore? A well bred person could hardly stand there and ask: "Excuse me, what rank do you hold in the hierarchy of human greatness?" And the same person finding himself in such a dilemma, could hardly trust himself to say :—"Signor Cavaliere," he must of necessity say : "Commendatore," at the same time thinking that had his interlocutor really held this rank he would not have been satisfied with allowing it to be conjectured by a simple initial.

The Sub-Prefect made the bow which he

had prepared; a bow which might be either a tacit acceptation of the title or an act of acknowledgment for the omen intentional or not as it might be.

"Signor—Commendatore," said Father Anacleto; "to what may I attribute the honour of your visit?"

"To the desire, the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Pray do not be surprised at this," answered the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo with great fluency of speech. "We poor officials promoted to the administration of the provinces, ought to know the country, in order to form a just conception of its needs; and we ought consequently to be acquainted with all our administrators even with those who do not require our aid."

The prior bowed and motioned his guest to a seat. But the Sub-Prefect feigned not to have noticed this invitation.

"I am on my way to visit all the little communes of the province," he continued.

"It is our *viâ crucis*. Therefore I hope you will not object to my being accompanied by two Carabineers. "Authority," added the Sub-Prefect, composing his lips into a smile, as he did every time he was about to utter something profound or graceful, "authority is friendship, paternity almost, which is the same as saying intimacy for men of worth; but for the people who do not understand it without the accompaniment of certain solemnities, it must be veiled in a cloud, accompanied by thunders and lightnings like the God of armies."

The prior bowed again but did not add a word of his own to that specimen of sublime eloquence.

"You will also perceive in my visit a little curiosity," resumed the Sub-Prefect leaving aside the thunders and lightnings, and condescending to issue from the clouds. "I will not deny it; indeed, I openly confess

that for some time I have had a great wish to know you, a person so highly and universally esteemed and to have a look at your lay-convent."

The prior who had seen through him at once and who did not wish to be taken for one of those who swallow anything, accepted the explanation and divined his object.

"It will be an honour for us to satisfy your curiosity, indeed it would not be possible to refuse this," added the prior, mitigating the harshness of the blow with a smile, "as we have done with all the gentlemen of Castelnuovo."

"Oh, if you had rather not"—stammered the Sub-Prefect; "if you object to visits—I should not like to intrude."

"No, pray do not be anxious about that," answered the prior. "Your curiosity, Signor Commendatore, we cannot object to, as your office renders it almost obligatory. You

ought to know everything; others have not the right to meddle with our affairs. We are not monks in a religious sense; we do not say Mass, we do not confess, we do not distil healing water, we do not make plasters. No, no remedies either for troubled souls or sick bodies. We attend instead to doctoring ourselves, in the silence and peace of a convent, and we think we do a good deal. Why wish to see us? We are made like others, and we live here as they live in town, enjoying the fresh air and doing something of no use, just to kill time. But enough of the gentlemen of Castelnuovo. With your permission, Signor Commendatore, I will give an order and return immediately."

The Commendatore *in votis* made a bow which signified at your convenience. And Father Anacleto, having quitted the parlour, went to seek the lay brother who was awaiting his orders.

"Brother Giocondo," he said in an under-

tone "inform our associates of this visit. The Sub-Prefect will remain to luncheon. Those who like to come to the refectory will be welcome, anyone who may be indisposed can be waited on in his own room."

Brother Giocondo replied with the gesture of one who has quite understood and needs no further injunctions, then he moved to go to the convent. But Father Anacleto still detained him.

"Take care that the Carabineers want for nothing, neither they nor their horses. Carabineers are excellent people. But I charge you not to let them make you sing."

"There is no fear of that," answered Brother Giocondo. "You know, prior, that I sing terribly out of tune."

"Well, I permit you to be out of tune, in the sense of not answering them in tune," replied Father Anacleto. "It is true we have nothing to conceal; but not everything which may be said, is said."

After this brief colloquy, the prior returned to his parlour.

"Here I am at your service, Commendatore," he said. "If you will follow me—"

CHAPTER III.

Here, then, is the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo let into the secrets of the convent of San Bruno. But alas, much less than he expected. Because, if he had made up his mind to surprise Signora Adele Ruzzani, he had reckoned without his host, owing to the prior's presence of mind.

To say the truth, the latter had so given his instructions as to leave all his colleagues free to be present or not as they chose. Neither will I conceal from you that the thought of the fair-haired seraph had something to do with his anxiety. It was necessary to be on the alert, for all these attempts to enter the convent had for their object, little Father Adelindo. The prior had guessed it, even without knowing that the little father came from the capital of the province. The charming little monk was persecuted

from within and without, and the prior defended him from within and without. It was part of the nobleness of his nature to do so, and also partly owing to that sort of chivalrous childishness peculiar to all men when they are not ashamed of being childish at certain times and places.

Thus it happened that at luncheon, of the sixteen monks who lived at San Bruno there were only fourteen in the refectory. Father Prospero and Father Adelindo were gone out, and the refectory bell never waited for anyone.

But how was this? There were not even fourteen present. Besides those two, whom the prior did not expect to see at table, Father Agapito was also absent. He out, too; and why? The prior found a moment in which to ask Brother Giocondo.

"He has gone for a walk with Father Prospero and the little father," answered the lay brother, "so as not to leave them

alone. All three told me to go to the hermitage of the Oaks, and let them know when the Sub-Prefect had departed."

"So as not to leave them alone!" muttered Father Anacleto to himself. "Very good."

And here one might add: "Very bad, confound it!" for Father Anacleto did not half like this news. The good prior was horribly put out at lunch, and whilst he was showing his tiresome visitor over the convent his bad temper increased so much that he began to answer him in an impatient manner which was not at all usual with him

"But do you know this is a little Paradise?" said the Sub-Prefect. "There is nothing wanting but the angel with the flaming sword to drive you out. Because, indeed, forgive my freedom of speech, you are guilty of treason towards society."

"Signor Commendatore," answered Father Anacleto, "we owe nothing at all to society."

"Ah, nothing!—nothing, indeed! Where

then do you place the canons of civil philosophy?"

"Civil philosophy! Civil philosophy is an invention of philosophers. And then, even if it were a serious matter—excuse me, I do not speak for my colleagues, who can best defend themselves; I speak for my own self, with whom I am pretty well acquainted—what, according to civil philosophy, is my duty towards society? To give myself to it according to my strength and talents. As for my strength, I gave it when it was required and as long as I was able, when I held one of those offices which are not often sought after, and one of those positions in which no one cares to be first. But, God be praised, there is a post if you will, which is not the cause of jealousy to its usual competitors; viz., the post of soldier in action. And here, modestly, but willingly, I have done my duty. There remains the obligation according to one's talents. But here

I beg you to take note of one thing. I have no talents, I am useless, therefore I owe nothing on that score."

"Pardon me, but your line of argument is not only slightly paradoxical," observed the Sub-Prefect, "but it is extremely unjust towards yourself." It was a well turned compliment; but the prior would not be caught by it.

"Do not believe it, Commendatore, do not believe it. I have a way of chatting which deceives people; but it is all superficial, habit, without a spark of learning. I studied little as a young man, and since I have been grown up have done nothing. To return to the question, I, without doctrine or treatise, reason thus. What are these social rights? As they teach, they are nothing but the justification of all tyranny, taken out of the hands of Titian and Caius, and given into the custody of Mr. Everyone, a man who never knows what he wants. Society wants

this, society wants that; you must not remain here because the interests of society do not permit it; you cannot move from here because the interests of society do not give their consent. If I study Arabic, society wants to make a professor of me; it is useless my saying that I have studied it for my own pleasure; I must be a professor, social interest requires it, in order that another professor may call someone a fool, and declare me to be an intruder into the temple of knowledge. For there is also the temple with its respective secret places and its respective priesthood. Society is well looked after with rhetoric for its steward. But in the name of heaven, we ought to understand the meaning of words, and the definition of duties. But we have a dozen schools, if not more, each of which interprets according to his own way of thinking. Once they were all doctrinarians; to-day they are all experimentalists; to-morrow they will all

be evolutionists; doctrines which admitted this or decided that, dividing themselves into various little sects; experimentalists which denied one thing and admitted another, dispersed also into as many laboratories; evolutionists who will admit and deny everything to make the way clear and begin all over again. First we have the free individual, indeed in a savage state, born without aid, except God and nature; then came or returned man, slave to all authority, ideal and material, from the philosopher's formula to the quaestor's vocation (excuse me, but this is history for clever brains). Now we have man free again, and all the theories mixed up together. To loose, to bind, concentration, destruction, free will and fatal impulse, probability and necessity, laws springing from facts, facts proceeding from laws, the egg before the hen, the hen before the egg; I, for my part, believe it to be all rubbish, a bundle of inventions, more or less happy, to

exercise modern rhetoricians and amuse the curious. I also believe in certain duties, but of a negative character, such as to do harm to no man. I also believe that to do good is a beautiful and noble thing; but, first of all, what are beauty and nobleness? Harmony of lives, equilibrium of faculties, people say now. Precisely for that reason, nobleness is a fact not a law. If it were, we could place five-sixths of humanity among the delinquents. Just consider what kind of harmony this is! There are indeed philosophers who call it antimony, and have boldly made a system out of it. You are wearied Commendatore. Do not deny it; I see it, I feel it, and I will end. We are here, more than a dozen men who amid so much confusion of ideas, have thought it wise to stand on one side. Added to this, that society wearied us; all of us, in some degree, have had to complain of society or of someone who belongs to us, and we threw up the

game. Here we are in a lay convent, as you rightly said. This is life on a small scale, and, therefore, easily accommodated to the tastes of all concerned, with conditions voluntarily accepted by each one. We live in peace, respecting the laws of the country, we pay the taxes, we do not ask to be considered as having a moral existence; in the eyes of society we exist, and we do not exist. As a reward for our modesty we only ask of it one thing: not to speak to us of its tyrannies, baptised with the name of positive duties. We had a tyrant, Mastino II. della Scala, who came here I don't know how, perhaps as an hereditary relic, obtained by the ancient monks of San Bruno. Even painted, that tyrant annoyed us; we showed him the door, we banished him to the parlour there, near the bridge, that he may adapt himself to strangers and leave us in peace."

Father Anacleto had never spoken so fluently or been so proud and sarcastic. But

of course, my readers, you have understood that Father Anacleto had lost his head. And all the time he was explaining his maxims Father Anacleto was thinking of something quite different; for example of Father Agapito who had gone out with Father Prospero and little Father Adelindo.

"So as not to leave them alone!"

This was what the lay brother had said, and these words were engraved before his eyes, like the famous *Mene Tekel Peres* before the eyes of Belshazzar—

"So as not to leave them alone!"

And our good prior went on vexing himself with this thought. Why? We will suppose that it was from love of the good discipline and gravity of the convent, result of a habit of inspection which makes one perceive a defect in every slight innovation. To think it was this will also be paying him a compliment, for he believed that this was the sole reason of his vexing himself.

Meanwhile the Sub-Prefect prepared to reply.

"You have spoken eloquently. Yes, allow me to say so, eloquently! But you will pardon me if I permit myself to add that even Cicero and Demosthenes—"

"Lost their cause; is that what you mean?" interrupted Father Anacleto. "Oh, good heavens, I know it as well as I know that I am neither Demosthenes nor Marcus Tullius. We, however, Signor Commendatore, we try our own causes and judge them ourselves, and in this, which is the principal cause, we have decided that we are right! Pray, how do you government officials act towards those who live in accordance with the laws? You tell them to be contented with what they have; at the most, you sometimes send the tax-gatherer down on them."

The Sub-Prefect smiled grimly. The words and the tone in which they were said annoyed him beyond measure.

"And sometimes," he replied, "we permit ourselves a slight observation. We are for liberty in everything, and for all, but we do not renounce the duty of giving advice when we think it necessary to do so. I will tell you frankly I have come here for two reasons. First of all, to convince you and your associates of the mistake you have made. Excuse me, but your renunciation of civil society is not right considering all the detriment thereby done to society. If you will not recognise society's claims think of those of Italy, of that great Mother, at whose resurrection the conjunction of all her sons will not be too much."

"This is a more serious argument," answered the prior, who, at the name of Italy, had raised his head and a sudden gleam had flashed from his eyes.

"They say that the fatherland is not a perceptible thing, and that there is a great deal of poetry mixed up with the formation

of this ideal. I know that we mingle with it the loves of our infancy, the tears of our youth, the blushes and the passions of our manhood. Italy comprises in itself the purest part of our interests, which are our affections and customs. Italy is our own pride of race, our conscious nobility of blood, strong as an idea matured for a long time, vigorous as an instinct which can neither be suppressed nor discussed. Wretched is the man who, in the rage of politics or following the thread of certain deductions of his own, forgets this conception of the fatherland, and, impatient to prove everything, to renovate everything, cannot put up with a small family grievance after having been obliged to suffer so much shame under a foreign rule!"

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo's face beamed with delight. But the second part of the discourse immediately supervened to cast a shadow over it.

"Our country should hold the first place

in our thoughts," continued Father Anacleto. "For it we should labour; for it we should stand aside at the proper time. Voluntary withdrawal is also a species of affection. And then, are we not still in Italy? And when its needs should be such as to require our assistance, should we not be found at our post? I know how to ride as well as any man, and put a horse to the charge also. I was at Montebello, Signor Commendatore, and no one can say that I forgot my duty towards my country. What is it you desire? That to fulfil this duty I should play counsellor to the Commune, or aspirant to the Ministry? There are already so many on that track! At any rate I do something. Do you not understand? I give an example of modesty to all those of weak intellect in my circumscription. And now, Signor Commendatore, with your permission we will proceed to the second reason of your visit."

The Sub-Prefect did not much relish the peremptory manner in which the prior led the conversation, speaking when and how he liked, changing the subject when and as he pleased. But since he had made a beginning he must needs go on to the end of the chapter, and he consented to proceed to the second part of the subject, but made up his mind to counterbalance the prior's superciliousness with the weight of his observations.

"I was just coming to it," he said, and paused to consider the best mode of expressing himself. "This is indeed the most delicate part, and I shall have need of all your indulgence. Are all of you gentlemen here, men? I mean to say, are there no women?"

Father Anacleto sprang from his seat.

"We are in for it now," he thought to himself.

"Why do you put this question to me?" he then asked, looking at the Prefect with an

air of inquisitiveness which wished to be satisfied.

"Because," answered the Sub-Prefect, "because there is a rumour in Castelnuovo—"

"Ah, a rumour! And pray what about?"

"That there is a woman in the convent of San Bruno—a girl escaped from her home." Having said this, our illustrious friend drew a long breath. At last he had disburdened himself of that which weighed on him so heavily!

The prior remained a few minutes without answering. He was still looking at him, but no longer with that expression of inquisitiveness which waits for an explanation, but of inquisitiveness which would divine his secret suspicions, the workings of his mind, his hidden ends.

"A minor?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"Still a ward," replied the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia.

"That is serious," said the prior. "And we are accused of seduction or something like it, are we not?"

"No. Heaven forbid that I should think such a thing, or lead others to think so," answered the Sub-Prefect readily. "Signorina Adele Ruzzani, for that is the girl's name, is here—the rumours in Castelnuovo are always right—with her uncle and guardian, Signor Prospero Gentili."

"Of her own free will then?" observed the prior.

"It appears so," said the other.

"Appears and is, Signor Sub-Prefect," retorted Father Anacleto, omitting to give his guest the title of Commendatore as he had done hitherto. "I have no further explanations to ask of you now that you have pronounced the names. There is, in fact, here among the last new-comers a Father Prospero with his nephew, very young, whose name corresponds very well with that of the

Signorina Ruzzani mentioned by you. They begged me to receive them into our community, and in consequence of the nephew's youth I accepted them only as novices. This signifies that no promise binds them; they are free to go away whenever they like. Do you wish to see them and interrogate them? With pleasure. But not here, you understand, not here; in the parlour at the bridge, where you can send for them. Because you must know, Signor Sub-Prefect, in our convent there is but one blessing, peace. And your request to see here, immediately, the two new companions of ours who were not in the refectory to welcome you, might give rise to gossip and suspicions, which I must avoid as far as possible."

"No, I need not see them," answered the Sub-Prefect, as soon as he was able to put in a word. "You are getting angry; you misjudge me, whilst I had come merely to let you know how things stood. I supposed

that you were not aware of anything—that you had been deceived; and as the Ruzzani family is one of the first of Castelnuovo, and of the whole province— At the present time it is only represented by Signorina Adele—a very talented girl, but rather eccentric. Always respectable, however, always respectable! Only one thing I cannot understand—for what reason or caprice the young lady made up her mind so suddenly to enter a society of men—"

"Of knights, Signor Sub-Prefect," interrupted the prior, "of knights, pray bear in mind."

"Oh, I do not doubt it for a moment; but you will understand that the world has its claims. In Castelnuovo, and also elsewhere, there has been a great fuss about Signorina Ruzzani's flight, and her entrance into the convent of San Bruno in men's clothes, for otherwise it was impossible; consequently the superior authority of the province referred

to me for information, for I was certainly aware of the fact, but I would not for the world have troubled you. This is the state of affairs. I may add that I did not come here expressly. As I have already had the honour of telling you, I was making a tour to visit our mountain Communes, and I have, as they say, killed two birds with one stone. I could have sent you word of what I knew, but preferred coming myself from motives of delicacy and convenience which I trust you will appreciate."

"Thanks," answered the prior, in a tone in which a vein of irony could be discerned. "But pray what is the object of your kind information? Am I to expel Signorina Ruzzani and her guardian from the convent of San Bruno to please the gossips of Castelnuovo?"

"Oh! not to please anyone, but to put an end to calumny, to the world's injurious tittle-tattle. Why not? I can under-

stand that you would not be willing to take any steps in the matter if at the time you received the two novices you had known one of them to be a woman ; but as you did not know anything—"

"I did not know it," replied the prior. "I was deceived all the more easily because I would not pay much attention to the matter. But if I had done so, if I had discovered and been pleased all the same to receive the feigned novice, what harm would there have been ?"

"None on your part. But since it is a saying that he who possesses much prudence is bound to make use of it, and because it would have been the part of a good knight to warn that girl of the false step she was making—"

"Your observation would be most just," interrupted the prior, "if the girl had come here alone. But pray do not forget that she came accompanied by her guardian, and lives here still with her guardian !"

"Ah, a precious idiot that guardian!" burst forth Cavaliere Tiraquelli.

"Indeed, he does not shine very greatly," the prior condescended to admit, for he was thinking of that excursion to the hermitage.

"Ah, you see, you even admit it!" cried the Sub-Prefect triumphantly, "added to this that there will be great scandal—I speak to a man of feeling, and so I speak openly—there will be great scandal if Signorina Ruzzani does not return home immediately and does not find means to deny this escapade. Indeed if she remains in the convent, if she lets people's gossip go unchecked, she will never find a husband; in spite of her millions she will not find one, unless someone comes forward from this place where all have known her and can bear testimony that this caprice, though most imprudent, has not been able to cast the shadow of an imputation on her good name."

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia reached the end of this period with evident

complacency. And he was all the more pleased at having turned it in that manner when he saw that Father Anacleto was thereby deeply wounded.

"Never fear, Signor Sub-Prefect, never fear!" cried the prior impetuously. "Here nobody dreams of marriage. Perhaps you imagine that we lay traps here for girls of fortune?"

The Sub-Prefect sprang to his feet with an expression half scandalised, half mortified.

"You really believe that I—with my words"—and here the Sub-Prefect's reticence was meant to give evidence of profound emotion—"If in your estimation I have said anything offensive or even disrespectful about your community, I beg you will forget that I have spoken at all."

"Yes, very well, thanks," said the prior, who seemed very much confused, and was really not feigning. "I thank you for your communication. I will see, I will consider,

I will put an end to this childish affair, because you are certainly right; an honest man cannot permit a girl to forfeit the world's esteem. You are right, I repeat, and I am most grateful to you. Do not ask me to accomplish everything to-day; I must study ways and means; but indeed, you may be quite sure that we will send home Signorina— What is her name?"

"Ruzzani."

"Ruzzani, very well; Signorina Ruzzani. Adelina Ruzzani, who permits herself escapades to San Bruno. A female Daniel, who of her own accord enters the den of lions! And wherefore? Girl's whims, all the more startling and eccentric because they emanate from a madcap's brain. Do you not think so, Signor Commendatore?"

"I am glad to see you in a good humour again," said the Sub-Prefect. "Upon my honour, I should have been very sorry if, with the best intentions, my words could have—"

"No, do not trouble to apologise. My justification lies entirely in my having paid no attention to certain appearances, and having allowed myself to be too easily taken in by the wonderful assurance with which uncle and nephew presented themselves to me. It is entirely owing to the young lady. I assure you she would make a good actress; if she goes on the stage she will create a furore for certain. Your justification, Signor Commendatore, is the honest desire to put an end to a scandal in the province of which you are the worthy governor. There never was any scandal here, your excellency may be sure of that; it lies wholly in the interpretation which the public may give to a fact so novel apparently, and what is more, so unnatural. And mark you, Signor Commendatore, the moral injury it does to us. Our tranquility, for which greatest of all blessings we have assembled in this solitude, our tranquillity requires that Signorina Adele

Ruzzani return to Castelnuovo, or go elsewhere if that abode does not please you, for we do not care to know where she goes."

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia was beside himself with delight.

"Allow me to shake hands with you!" he cried.

Father Anacleto let him have his way. He was longing to be rid of him, so that he might throw off the mask which oppressed him.

"It is a great privilege for me to have made the acquaintance of a man of your worth, amongst my subjects," resumed the Sub-Prefect, "because the lay convent of San Bruno is, in fact, under my jurisdiction. I am the only one of the provincial governors in Italy who can boast of possessing a similar novelty."

"Has San Bruno then obtained favour in your sight?" inquired Father Anacleto.

"You are laughing at me? After all the

wise considerations which you have lain before me, I have almost felt a wish to bury human greatness here, and shut myself up in San Bruno with you."

"If you come," said the prior smiling, "we will make you Prefect of our assembly."

The Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo left, thank God, accompanied by the two "satellites of power." He rubbed his hands, worthy personage as he was, in crossing the bridge of the hermitage.

"The auspices are favourable," he said to himself. "The misanthrope has promised to send the young lady away; he called me Commendatore, he ended by offering me a Prefecture. May God and the Home Secretary follow his example."

CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile under the shady trees— But no, let us first speak of Father Anacleto. You have seen him rather disagreeable in his conversation with the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo Bedonia, and not only because the visit of the Government representative annoyed him. Brother Giocondo's words were engraved on his mind, and he continued to brood over them. "So as not to leave them alone!" But was it absolutely necessary that they should not go for a walk in the wood alone, when it was within the convent boundaries, and about two hundred steps from the house? And was it absolutely necessary that Father Agapito should take upon himself that knight's errand? He had never observed Father Agapito with the eyes of an artist; but, thinking of him at that moment, he seemed to him the youngest

and handsomest of all the recluses of San Bruno. And he was just the one who had accompanied the young lady and her uncle, *so as not to leave them alone!*

And now the Sub-Prefect with his chattering had made him lose valuable time. How much conversation, and of a more agreeable kind, would they not have been having in the hermitage of the Oaks? And he meanwhile, the poor prior, was engaged with the Sub-Prefect talking about the young lady! And he had to listen to the suspicion that an aspirant to Adele Ruzzani's hand would arise out of the lay convent of San Bruno! And might not that aspirant, whose existence he denied, be Father Agapito in person? This thought suffocated him; it had made him rebound like a spring; it had made him unjust to her, fierce with Signor Prospero, furious with Father Agapito, and, finally, discontented with himself. Ah yes, discontented beyond expression!

The poor prior did not the least know what was the matter with himself. Therefore, I, whose duty it is to portray this man to you, find myself compelled to let you guess it. If someone had appeared to him at that moment, and had bluntly let out to him what we are now thinking about him, he would have done something worse than rebound like a spring. I wager that our excellent prior would have exploded as those gunpowder mills do sometimes, through a well directed shot from hostile artillery, or through the imprudence of friends and guards.

He in love, indeed ? He, the man of peace, whose heart was dead to all affections, and who was the meritorious founder of the second vocation ? Oh, impossible !

Having accompanied the Sub-Prefect as far as the bridge (and with what pleasure you can imagine) Father Anacleto returned towards the convent. It was three in the afternoon. The sky was serene, of a pale sapphire tint,

sprinkled with gold dust, in the blaze of the sun. The old monastery of San Bruno wore an air of *fête*, almost of youth. Wrinkles disappear from the face at a ball under the light of the tapers. And even a fissured wall, blackened and corroded by a hundred winters, may look beautiful when the sun's rays beat upon it. And then the walls of the San Bruno convent assumed an appearance of life from its high windows with their projecting supports, from whence hung down a cluster of diverse coloured violet tufts, verbenas, and sturdy wall flowers; a beautiful custom revived by the ancient recluses, who all loved to have their hanging gardens, as if to invite the smiles of the sun in the early morning hours. The great door was wide open, and beyond the partial darkness of the corridor could be seen a more vivid light playing between the columns in the cloister, perhaps because it was reflected from the recently whitewashed walls; and,

together with that light, the vivid scarlet tints of the oleanders and the graceful marigolds peeped out from between the cracks.

Father Anacleto was not attracted by the glad spectacle of the entrance. In the light of the aperture, whence this variety of warm tints appeared, certain dark profiles could be discerned, which came and went like shadows. They were Father Anacleto's companions, who were pacing to and fro along the arcades of the cloisters. Usually about that time the monks of San Bruno rested from their studies, assembled together to chat and had interminable discussions on art, philosophy, and politics. This uninteresting subject for discussion also had its place at San Bruno, but a crooked one, taken at second hand, so to speak, and without the thousandth part of what mathematicians call its initial force. Politics diluted in fact; politics passed through a sieve, and which

had left behind all its tiresome accompaniment of personal motives. If you only knew how well one talks politics when one neither hopes for nor expects anything therefrom directly or indirectly! One feels as pleased as do so many astronomers when the subject of the revolution of Mars, the depressions of Saturn, and the splendours of Venus, is started amongst them. It seemed to Father Anacleto that those monks were moving with greater rapidity than usual, or at least with more activity, a sign of vivacity, of greater gladness and exuberance of spirits. He was pleased at this, for, as I have said, it was not one of Father Anacleto's best days, and everything vexed him.

Turning to the right, he followed a path by the side of the convent walls. And there, also, everything seemed to smile in the sunshine, more than it had ever seemed to do before; perhaps because he had never before happened to observe so much contrast be-

tween the aspect of things and the state of his own mind. The path was bordered on each side by lovely herbs, such herbs as are only noticed by botanists. Suppose that parsnip was on one side and sorrel on the other. But the parsnip's umbels were such a splendid white, the leaves of the sorrel of such an insolent green, that he never remembered to have seen their equal; perhaps because he had never before happened to observe so much contrast— Confound it! I was repeating the same phrase I said just now. Forgive me, my readers, I have stopped in time, and will say nothing more. And the hornets buzzing here and there amongst the foliage! And the golden spotted butterflies flitting from flower to flower! And the locusts hopping from bush to bush! And the grasshoppers chirping monotonously from the trunk of every tree! And the lizards gliding from one stone to another! And the insects of a hundred

different species that were humming their hymn of life on every side! Labour under every form, every living voice on every side importuned Father Anacleto who was going—Where was he going? You shall hear presently, if you have not already guessed. As he proceeded, gradually the path became more rugged. The rocky soil nurtured those plants, which grew most readily. But at that season the spring growths were giving way to those of summer, and whole families of erect corpses could be seen, which a puff of wind would have blown away, or a kick utterly destroyed. They were chiefly ledas that had proudly displayed their white corollas and gilded stamens in May, but which then showed withered calyxes and leaves burnt up by the sun. Everything there, however, was not old or fading. In the midst of that heap of dead bushes, the heather raised its verdant tips, covered with tiny flowers; and the plum trees displayed

their rosy fruit, ripened by the autumn sun; and the thyme was clothing anew its little twisted branches, and the bryony spread its delicate tendrils from shrub to shrub. Everything gave evidence of life; even death since it put forward germs of future life. From the shrivelled calyxes appeared the half open capsules with their seeds ready to burst forth, to give life to new generations of plants. And the blaze of the sun was over all with the calm, powerful eye of the eternal Lord, who possesses all and is loved by all.

Again you will ask me, where was the prior going? And now if I do not make up my mind to tell you, you are quite capable of telling me, thereby making me lose the credit of the announcement. Father Anacleto was slowly wending his way to the hermitage of the Oaks.

The small monkish edifice so called, rose from a hill behind the convent. From thence

the view was expansive, and in the distance between two mountain peaks, a valley spread itself out, in the depth of which, just where the plain met the horizon, something white could be discerned, which must be the small town of Castelnuovo Bedonia. Viewed from that height, the capital of the province, governed by Cavaliere Eudossio Tiraquelli, did not seem at all disagreeable; indeed, scarcely had the fair-haired seraph reached the summit of the steep ascent, than he declared that to be the only point from which his lawful residence could be contemplated with anything like pleasure.

The hermitage took its name from a row of oaks which were first seen near the top of the hill. The oak bordered the stony path which led to that solitude. But most of the trees had been cut down by the first purchasers of the convent. Five or six oaks with twisted trunks alone remained, which had fortunately seemed good for nothing and had

been left standing on their native ridge, whence they extended their huge branches over a lateral bend of the hill.

The peacefulness of the spot was adapted to calm even so perturbed a spirit as Father Anacleto's. In that sunny solitude, the ear readily accustomed itself to the chirping of the grasshopper, which in town would seem so monstrous and tiresome. The hopping of the locusts, the flitting of the butterflies from bush to bush, the swift passage of the dragon-flies with their delicate bodies and metallic reflections, everything, even to that confused tremor in the air, which seemed a continuous mingling of the earth's vapours with the constant rays of the sun, must gladden the eye of the traveller, or at least make him for a moment, forget the cares of life. But other sounds had reached Father Anacleto's ears which did not allow him to listen to the song of the grasshopper. And his eyes sought someone, whose near presence

was indicated by those sounds. You will have understood that the sound was one of voices. It came precisely from the hollow of the hill which was protected by the shade of the oaks. Father Anacleto advanced cautiously, with that natural propensity we all possess to surprise a secret and which, in his case, was increased from particular reasons which it is useless to relate.

He advanced cautiously, as I have said, proceeded along the hill between the bushes and saw— He saw something which was wicked enough to horribly resemble an idyllic scene. You too, my kind readers, must be aware of the fact, that there is nothing more annoying than an idyl in which we ourselves are not taking part, and a prominent part in addition. Let us describe the scene. First of all, Father Prospero was lying on the grass, truly a carpet neither too soft nor too green, his head resting on the projection of a rock, his handkerchief over

his eyes to shelter himself from the sun's rays which pierced the foliage. The fair-headed seraph was seated near Father Prospero, his lap full of flowers. Farther off, near a plum tree, Father Agapito was stretching out his hands to gather some blossoming twigs for the fair-haired seraph.

"Give me those," said the little monk, "and do not gather any more. Do you wish to bury me in flowers? I have enough for three wreaths instead of one."

Father Agapito hastened to obey and carried two beautiful boughs full of fiammola blossoms to him. In case you should not know it, fiammola is the most beautiful and the most sweet-scented of our clematis tribe. It grows wild in the woods and encircles the trunks of trees with its flexible arms, twines round plum trees, winds in and out, climbs up and falls back gracefully, displaying its beautiful little white, star-like

flowers, from whose centre arise clustered, thread-like stamens.

The fair-haired seraph had made a wreath of these delicate little branches, and yielding to a childish impulse had placed it on his brow. He looked like one of those charming little crowned monks we meet so often in pictures of the fourteenth century, so full of poetry and religious sentiment.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the prior, furious.

Forgive Father Anacleto this outburst of bad temper. He had seen Father Agapito place himself before the seraph, and remain there enraptured, adoring, like a Dominican or some Franciscan in presence of the Madonna, in one of those pictures already mentioned.

He had felt a wish to spring out of his hiding-place. But the thought of being looked upon as an intruder, withheld him. It was a thought full of bitterness, which

was hitherto unknown to him, or which perhaps he had forgotten for a long time. Poor Father Anacleto paused, as if studying this new feeling in his heart, then tossed his head indignantly and moved away from his observatory, slowly at first, so as not to be heard, then swiftly on the road which led to the convent.

Presently he stood still without any apparent reason, looked round, bit his lips, shook his head, then resumed his way. Alas, Father Anacleto! How changed from that good prior of former days, who lived contentedly at San Bruno, in the placid renunciation and calm contempt of the whole world!

He it was who had invented the phrase, and on him Nature, ever inexorable, avenged oppressed humanity.

Nothing pleased him at that moment; neither the sun, whose rays struck him obliquely, compelling him to shade his eyes;

nor the shrill cry of the grasshoppers, which he perceived for the first time that day; nor the flutter of the insects, flies, and bees whizzing against his cheeks, moist with perspiration; nor the butterflies that flitted fitfully before his eyes. A beautiful green lizard was sunning itself on the top of a rock, and was looking at him with two eyes brilliant as rubies. You must know that the lizard is the friend of man. Perhaps some day I will tell you the history of my friendship with two lizards—a friendship which cost them their lives. But, not to neglect Father Anacleto's lizard, I must tell you that the innocent saurian remained there staring at the traveller and panting with his half-open jaws. Did it seem to the prior that that graceful little animal was laughing at him? Or was it perhaps rather that at that moment he did not wish to see anyone, neither man nor beast? The fact remains that the prior stooped, picked up a stone,

and raised it meaning to chastise the insolent creature. Fortunately the lizard saw that upraised arm, and glided away like lightning. However, Father Anacleto also, repenting of that impulse of unreasonable anger, let fall the stone.

"Confound it!" he muttered, resuming his walk, "I must make an end of this; otherwise there will be no peace."

He then returned straight to the convent without any more pauses or soliloquies. Nearly all his monks were under the portico, and were talking politics while waiting for dinner. I have already mentioned that that subject was not banished from San Bruno. We can talk politics without rancour when there are no personal motives mixed up with it directly or indirectly, just as we can lay hold of a viper or a rattlesnake with impunity if we have first deprived these most interesting ophidii of their poisonous fangs. There is always need of caution when touch-

ing them in order to avoid being crushed. So it is with politics; even under the form of an academical discourse it must be handled delicately.

Owing to the respect with which Father Anacleto was treated by all, his opinion was asked on a point of controversy. But the prior, who at any other time would have found a way of contenting both parties by seeing good, or at least good intentions, everywhere, this time did not follow his usual method, and found fault with everything. All went wrong in Italy now. They were in a nice mess. Either the Ministry would be overthrown, or great misfortunes would arise.

"Prior, did you tell the Sub-Prefect this?" asked Father Tranquillo facetiously.

"I should certainly have done so had he asked my opinion," answered Father Anacleto. "He came, however, to speak to me of quite another matter. Do you know what about?"

"Do tell us," they all said, gathering round the prior.

"About the two novices we have received at San Bruno."

Thus spoke the prior, and immediately repented of having broached the subject. But the two novices had been less fortunate than the lizard. The stone was cast, and there was no withholding it by wishing to do so.

"The deuce he did!" exclaimed Father Atanasio. "And how comes the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo to be concerned in the matter?"

"He is concerned—in this way," stammered the prior, who was now obliged to tell everything, "because Father Prospero is an old guardian of Castelnuovo."

"A noble office, that of guardian!" said Father Tranquillo. "And perhaps our novice has squandered his ward's substance?"

"If he had that would not concern us!" exclaimed the prior.

"What harm has he done then?" cried Father Bonaventura.

"You have begun; now you must tell us everything," added Father Restituto.

"He has brought his ward among us," answered the prior in a sepulchral tone.

"Ah, little Father Adelindo!" they all exclaimed.

"Who is not a little father," replied Father Anacleto. "The ward, gentlemen, is —a woman."

"Marvellous discovery!" cried Father Restituto. "We always said so, and you would not believe us."

The prior frowned at Father Restituto's sally, the head of the opposition in chapter.

"Gently, gently!" observed Father Tranquillo, taking his superior's side. "Our good prior, if I rightly remember his words, never said he would not believe it. He said

that if the little monk had been—a little nun there was nothing to be done, and that we as knights must behave as though we were not aware of the truth."

"And perhaps I was wrong," added the prior gravely. "We were then in doubt; now we have certainty. Little Father Adelindo is none other than Adele Ruzzani, a girl inhabiting Castelnuovo, ward of Signor Prospero Gentili, her maternal uncle, and the fortunate heiress to a handsome patrimony. The caprice of an eccentric brain led her here—to the convent of fools, as they have the courtesy to say down there! The guardian is a fool—at least his compliance with such an extraordinary design of his niece's shows him to be one."

"That dear Father Prospero!" observed Father Anselmo compassionately.

"And we," continued the prior, without heeding the interruption, "we are in a strange dilemma. We must either forego the

monastic tranquillity so dear to us by retaining a woman amongst us, or we must appear ridiculous by pretending not to know it. What do you think of it?"

"I see nothing ridiculous," said Father Restituto.

"What? You who are just the one that made the most fuss?"

"Your arguments have converted me," answered Father Restituto, with a candour which savoured of irony. "However, friend prior, if you put the two horns of the dilemma to the vote, you will find the majority for the ridiculous. Pardon me, but one man's taste is as good as another so long as he is satisfied with it. Little Father Adelindo, for I will still call him so, is a capital fellow. He is the life and soul of the convent. When he is not here everything seems dark. In fact, gentlemen," concluded Father Restituto, raising his voice and extending his hand, "here is a ray of sunshine."

Just at that moment the fair-haired seraph was seen issuing from the corridor, followed by Father Prospero and Father Agapito.

The latter did not look altogether pleased. Perhaps he was sorry the walk was ended; perhaps he had met with some little contre-temps. Jollier was Father Prospero, who at last had found some shade, and who was also approaching the refectory. That morning the cook had promised him a dinner after his own heart, with the repetition of a certain dish of lamb which he had immensely relished the preceding day, and Father Prospero, sending all medical advice to the devil, was abandoning himself to all the voluptuousness of anticipation, which was indeed a precious ally for his incipient *polysarchy*. Little Father Adelindo entered the cloister, walking a little in front of his companions. His face, crowned by that short fair hair you know so well, was glowing with a delicate crimson resembling the colour of Bengal roses, which is transparent through a white surface.

And his eyes! What shall I say of his eyes? In looking at them one could comprehend Beatrice's smile, which has taxed the patience of all commentators of the *Divina Commedia*. You will remember, my readers, that Beatrice smiled with her eyes. I am pointing out a new fact, which will be easily understood when we consider that the little fair-haired monk was being seen for the first time without any doubt as to her sex.

"How could she ever trust herself to come here disguised as a man?" the bystanders asked themselves.

And this tacit inquiry was a natural one throughout the convent of San Bruno. Those who had believed the fair-haired novice to be a man must confess to having seen double; all the rest might well wonder at their companions doing so. Henceforward it was the duty of all to acknowledge the woman, even though they would appear to be still under deception.

The bows which the fair-haired seraph received were numerous; personal compliments alternated with pressing inquiries about his walk. A little more and some would have offered their arm to conduct him into the refectory. Secret influence of two beautiful eyes.

"I must put an end to this," muttered the prior, who was standing rather apart. "I must put an end to this!"

The fair-haired seraph approached him with his charming smile. The poor prior felt his heart beat at the playful light of those two gems whence Love had discharged his arrows. (Allow me to make use of a Danteskish simile.) So making a violent effort, and composing his countenance into an expression of unusual severity, he thus spoke to the fair-haired seraph—

"What have you done with your wreath of fiammole?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the seraph, "were

you up there? But why did you not join us?"

Father Anacleto did not deem it opportune to reply.

"However, you did quite right," added the seraph. "We were talking so much about you."

"About me?" asked the prior, raising his eyebrows. "And what could you have to say about me?"

"Certainly nothing bad. Indeed I thought at one time your ears must tingle. Amongst other things, we were saying how that Sub-Prefect must have bored you by staying so long."

Thus saying, the seraph fixed his eyes on the prior, as though he would read in his face the secret of that visit.

"Ah, yes," said Father Anacleto, "that Sub-Prefect is a strange man."

"What did he want? May I be allowed to know?"

"I will tell you later, Father Adelindo. It so happens that I want to speak to you and your uncle, and you will kindly come to me after dinner."

"No, no, not with my uncle," answered the seraph. "I had rather be alone. I will go towards the garden, and you can join me. Will that do?"

Father Anacleto was rather disconcerted by such a peremptory manner. However he shrugged his shoulders and bowed with a gesture, which signified "Your will be done."

CHAPTER V.

The dinner seemed interminable to two persons who had so much to say to each other. That is, I must explain, one had to speak, the other to listen; but you will agree with me that that other would never be satisfied with listening, but would also speak. Now Father Anacleto was just as curious to know what the little father, seeing himself discovered, would reply, as the little father was curious to learn what the prior would say to him, in what manner, and with what intentions.

At last they rose from table, and the little father, one of the first to leave the refectory, went and shut himself in his cell. Did he wish to avoid his companions, or more especially his uncle?

The latter, however, was not to be had at any price, however much he might have been

wished for. He had overworked himself, and felt the need of a little repose; therefore he had gone to the library to rest in a certain easy chair, and sleep had extended its wings over his innocent head. Father Agapito, Father Restituto and more of his flatterers, who had followed him immediately, hoping for the fair nephew's return, were obliged to leave him to his drowsiness. When they returned to the courtyard, they saw the prior leaving the other side of the cloister, with the seraph by his side.

The prior was talking of some important matter, and was pausing continually, as if he wished to emphasize his words; the seraph walked or stood still, following the movements of his interlocutor, and gave signs of great attention, often bending his head in sign of assent.

In short, there were all the symptoms of a dialogue which was not to be interrupted by importunate companions.

"Friends," said Father Restituto to all those who had remained with him like a handful of flies, "I should not like our excellent prior, after having recognised the woman, to fall in love with one."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Father Marcellino, who was passing by on his way to his cell, and seeing that knot of observers, had paused. "Do you imagine that the founder of the Order himself would fall short of his own doctrine?"

"Oh, he would not be the first," remarked Father Ilarione. "There was the Creator Himself, who repented of having made man."

"Really," added Father Costanzo, "it would be a nice thing if the example of prevarication came from him."

"From the Creator?" inquired Father Marcellino acutely.

"No, I am talking of Father Anacleto, of the creator of the second vocation."

"Perhaps you would be glad of the example?"

The thrust was enough to make him angry, but Father Costanzo pretended not to hear it.

"Example, example," he muttered, "it is always a bad thing, example."

"When it is bad, certainly. But who says, gentlemen, that Father Anacleto intends giving the community of San Bruno a bad example? The prior is talking to one of his monks, I see nothing more."

"What, after all that has come to our knowledge?" asked Father Restituto. "After what he said himself, before going into the refectory?"

"Ah, that may be exactly it; he is speaking to the fair novice about the revelation which has been made to him to-day."

"Brother Marcellino is right," said Father Agapito, who had hitherto been silent. "I wager that the prior is playing us one of his tricks."

"What trick?" cried Father Restituto, Father Costanzo, and Father Ilarione unanimously.

"He is persuading Father Adelindo to leave the convent."

"Oh, that is too much."

"You will see that it is exactly as I say. Our prior is the spirit of opposition itself. When we told him of it, he would not believe it. And now that we are silent—"

"Just because we are silent," added Father Agapito.

"You yourself, Brother Restituto, said to him frankly and boldly 'let us admit that it is ridiculous.' Little Father Adelindo is a good fellow; he is in nobody's way; he only asks to live with us in this peaceful community. Perhaps he also has his little troubles; he too may wish to forget the vexations of the world; why should we hinder him?"

"Certainly!" cried Father Ilarione, sup-

ported by his colleagues' approval. "Why should we hinder him? It would be uncharitable of us."

"And the prior would be doubly wrong to send him away without consulting his companions," added Father Restituto. "We are all equal here, and the priorship is only an appointment—"

"Of a purely administrative nature!" cried Father Costanzo. "He cannot put his will, his caprice in the place, and instead of everybody else's."

"We have always acted together, I do not deny," observed Father Marcellino. "But perhaps this is a different case. The opinions expressed the other day in chapter, may have induced him to act on his own responsibility."

"No, there is no question of responsibility. Everything must be done in chapter."

"Well then, ask him to convoke the chapter, and present your petition; we will

have Father Adelindo; Adelindo or death," said Father Marcellino laughing.

"Come now, you are joking," observed Father Costanzo frowning.

"We do not say that the little father must remain at all hazards," added Father Restituto, "we only say, and we will maintain, that we demand to be consulted."

"Yes, that is it exactly!" cried both Father Costanzo and Father Ilarione.

But Father Agapito, who that day was the least loquacious of them all, checked his colleagues.

"We are chattering," he said, "whilst the prior is deciding."

"What else can we do?" asked Father Marcellino.

"Go down yonder and disturb the colloquy."

"Bravo! And do you not think he might say—"

"What would he say, come?"

"What you would say if you were in his shoes, and if he were in yours: 'Father Agapito, please have a little patience; in half-an-hour we will join you.'"

"True," remarked Father Agapito, yielding to the force of the argument, "a man could not be more courteously dismissed. But let us see if there is nothing better to be done. I have an idea—"

"What?" they all exclaimed.

"To send someone, to whom it would be impossible to say 'excuse me, in half-an-hour we will join you.' Father Prospero, for instance. We will wake him, we will equip him for war, and throw him like a fire-ship into the flanks of the enemy."

The idea found favour, indeed it made furore amongst the bye-standers. It will be understood that Father Marcellino was snubbed; indeed I may add that he went about his own business, after having smiled compassionately at his colleagues' folly.

The three conspirators re-entered the church. Father Prospero, happy man, was snoring beatifically in his trusty arm-chair. And they all surrounded him, making a fiendish row, jumping, screaming, flicking their handkerchiefs in his face. But Father Prospero bravely resisted the assault. Then they seized him by his hands, which were crossed on his stomach, and shouted all kinds of nonsense in his ear.

"Brother Prospero, awake; the convent is on fire."

"He who sleeps, catches no fish."

"He who lies awake at night and sleeps in the day, never gains riches or honour."

At last Father Prospero roused himself.

"Friends," he said, opening his eyes and shutting them again immediately, "*ego dormio, sed cor meum vigilat.*"

"Ah yes, indeed, a nice watch it keeps!"

"Certainly, it is digesting," answered Father Prospero, trying to go to sleep again.

"What did you say? Does the heart in you take charge of that delicate operation? What does the stomach do meanwhile?"

"I know nothing about it; it is a question of internal arrangements, with which I do not meddle. Those whom it concerns may think about it. And you others let me sleep in peace."

"Bravo! Whilst your beautiful niece is hearing her sentence!"

These words had the effect of making him jump up from his easy chair.

"What sentence?" he cried; "what do you know of my niece?"

"We know, Brother Prospero," said Father Restituto "we know what the prior told us after his colloquy with the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo. Do not puzzle yourself about such a trifle, and let us come to what is essential. Now the prior is gone into the garden with little Father Adelindo. Do you understand me? The Sub-Prefect's

visit and his revelations are bearing their fruit."

"Ah!" said Father Prospero like a man who has quite understood; or, also, like a man who yawns. And he fell back in his chair, much more inclined to go to sleep again than to continue the conversation.

"Well?" cried Father Restituto, "you do not care?"

"And why should I care about the prior talking to my nephew? The prior is an excellent man, and will take no liberties with him."

"Yes, but if meanwhile he told him roundly to go away?"

"I should go away; my nephew would go away; we should both go away."

"With such indifference?"

"Most certainly. What else do you want? That we should remain in paradise against the will of the saints?"

"But you are not here against anybody's

will," replied Father Restituto. "We are all fond of you."

"You are the most precious of friends," added Father Costanzo.

"A real brother to us all," affirmed Father Ilarione.

"The most congenial of men," pursued Father Agapito.

"Thanks, thanks!" exclaimed Father Prospero, laughing; "you may add the most amiable of uncles. Don't you think so?" he added, accepting his position cheerfully, and wishing not to appear too ridiculous. "An uncle who is not to be met with every day. Perhaps rather weak, both as uncle and guardian, and I have allowed myself to be led by the nose. But what was I to do? I should have liked to see you in my shoes. I held her at the font, that dear child. So high, you understand? There was no one else at home, and I was all in all to her. Only fancy, when she saw me she

would not even stay with her nurse, and you can imagine how fond of her I became. Dear little thing! And what a head, good heavens, what a head! Because, gentlemen, it is not only her beauty which attracts—"

"She is an angel," murmured Father Agapito.

"But also her learning," continued Father Prospero.

"Oh, as for that, she is a Saint Thomas Redivivus," interrupted Father Costanzo.

"What Saint Thomas do you mean?" enquired Father Restituto.

"Saint Thomas Aquinas, by Jove!"

"Ah, I thought you meant Thomas Didymus. In fact her coming up here, which to imbeciles might seem boldness, to me, seems love of truth, thirst for knowledge—"

"Oh, you are quite right, thirst for knowledge," resumed Father Prospero. "Just imagine, one day she wanted to go to the Arctic pole. She would have quenched her

thirst in those latitudes! And then she wanted to go the Equator to quench her thirst at the sources of the Nile. And I was to follow her! I should have been cured of my polysarchy; what do you think? Fortunately for my legs, her mania took the form of the convent of fools— Oh, I beg your pardon; I repeat the term commonly used at Castelnuovo. Though all things considered—well! to speak the truth—you have a taint of madness. It must be the air of San Bruno. So true it is, that it seems to me I have caught the infection myself."

A burst of laughter greeted Father Prospero's ingenuous confession.

"Well, then, we were saying," continued Father Adelindo's maternal uncle; "here we are, both of us. You do not suppose me so foolish as not to see the danger of our having come."

"Danger!" cried Father Restituto. "And of what sort?"

"Certainly the danger of being considered rather wild in the eyes of the world. Now the evil is done, and judgment is passed upon us, for we are the talk of Castelnuovo. But I don't care a rap—excuse the expression—and if my niece listens to me, we shall not return to Castelnuovo."

"Ah, bravo!" cried all in chorus.

"Thanks!" replied Father Prospero, bowing. "We shall not return there; we will go to Turin, Milan, Venice, Vienna, Paris, all places where the cuisine is excellent. I am an eclectic in culinary matters. It suffices for me that it be excellent."

The hilarity of the three listeners had promptly vanished.

"Go away! Leave us here!" exclaimed Father Restituto. "But is it possible, Brother Prospero, that you should do anything so dreadful? And for what reason? Because the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo took it into his head to bring the tittle-tattle of

his province up here? I should for that very reason be inclined to stay here in defiance of all the Sub-Prefects and all the capitals in the world. The prior will speak in the same strain as the Sub-Prefect? It is well known," remarked the orator ironically, "that authorities support each other. But, if it so happens, we will overthrow authority."

"No, do not trouble yourselves," answered Father Prospero quietly. "You would make of me an apple of discord. For what use? As an offering to Venus I should be rather too heavy."

Father Restituto did not much relish the wit which, according to Father Prospero, would have placed him in the position of Paris.

"I understand," he said, shaking his head sadly. "It is you who wish to leave us, and you make use of any pretext."

"I beg your pardon, my dear friend,"

answered Father Prospero, who had that day become bold, since the discoveries of his interlocutors; "I do not wish to conceal anything from you. The idea of departure is not mine; you yourselves see that this crisis has been entirely caused by the Sub-Prefect's visit. But certainly this crisis suits me; oh, yes, suits me very well. Only the other day I was saying to my niece 'What is to be the upshot of all this? Are you not satisfied with a month's noviciate? Do you really want to await the tonsure?'"

"A valuable confession," cried Father Costanzo. "You, then, were the tempter."

"But at least, you will not leave us at once?" put in Father Ilarione. "You are human, Father Prospero!"

"Then you will set me down as a barbarian, if I manage to extricate myself from this strange position!"

"Strange, as much as you like. But really strange things are those which please most in life, as well as on the stage."

"You say rightly, on the stage. We are indeed on a stage. And we have come masked. Do you not see, Father Ilarione? I have never been so much at my ease as now that the mask has fallen, and that there is no longer any need of altering the tone of my voice."

"You have acted a most charming masquerade," observed Father Restituto. "You should continue it some weeks longer. Come now, let us say some days if you do not like weeks. Besides, you two were not the only ones who wore masks. What are we, if not laymen in friars' masks."

"I don't know what pleasure it gives you," said Father Prospero; "but I believe with the proverb, 'that every good joke is short lived.'"

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted Father Agapito. "Let it last as long as it can. Besides, the end does not concern you. You must obey."

"And who pray?"

"Your niece, who will wish you to remain."

"Remain? What do you know about it, Father Agapito?"

"Well I refer you to her own words. Only this morning at the hermitage of the Oaks, you were present in flesh and blood, if, perhaps, not in spirit; she said: 'I am so glad to be here! Peace is a great blessing and I cannot understand why so many people in this world tear themselves to pieces that they may have war, just as I do not understand anyone going to the end of the world to admire an effect of the sun, or the moon, which we have close at hand, at home.'"

Father Prospero smiled with an uncle's pride.

"Dear child!" he said, as though speaking to himself. "And when I reasoned thus she would not believe I was right, and she had

taken it into her head to go to the Arctic pole or the Equator!"

"She likes to be here," pursued Father Agapito. "And now you want to carry her off, so that the Equator caprice may enter her head again?"

"Be quiet! That is not likely. But how can we remain here, if the prior drives us away?"

"We will manage that. In a memorable assembly our chapter held he wished to retain the little father. Why has he changed his mind? we will ask him."

"But," retorted Father Prospero, who decidedly had no wish to end his days at San Bruno, "if I am rightly informed it was you who would not have the little father in the convent. Why do you now change your mind I ask you?"

"Brother Prospero, do you wish to know? Really?" then said Father Agapito.

"Yes, by Jove; though I think I have

already guessed your secret, I should like amazingly to know how you will explain it in the presence of us three."

"You are quite wrong if you think that difficult. It is a secret we could tell you were we sixteen, as many as the inmates of San Bruno. In fact," added Father Agapito with the smile of a fencer who has parried a difficult stroke just in time, "it is not a question of our secret, but of Father Anacleto's. Our good prior would not hear a word about dismissing the little father as long as his heart was not disturbed. And even now he would not wish it if he did not suspect that he had a rival. Now, Brother Prospero, mark my words well. Everything depends on this colloquy which you will not go and interrupt. If the prior perceives that there is a possibility of his being preferred (which is quite possible, for women are never to be trusted) he will say nothing in the sense the Sub-Prefect of

Castelnuovo desires. And you, Brother Prospero, you will stay here, if not till the consummation of all things, at least till that of your beautiful niece's charming caprices."

"Ah, I daresay that would be rather too much," cried Father Prospero, not at all pleased at such a prospect. "I think too that it would be better to go down yonder." And jumping up he resolutely left the library.

"It was hard work to get him to move!" exclaimed Father Agapito.

"The expedient seems to me rather a risky one," observed Father Restituto. "It might recoil on us."

"I have cut off all chance of that," said Father Agapito, stretching himself in sign of resignation. "But mark what I say, little Father Adelindo will not stay at San Bruno any longer. Of course the prior will not turn him out. But he will offer his arm to lead him out."

"Is it merely a suspicion on your part?" asked Father Restituto.

"Yes, as regards the prior. But I have some reason for thinking that the little father will not object to his attentions. And you know that when a woman is disposed to permit a man to pay her his addresses, if he is not a fool that man perceives it. But what is the matter? Here is Father Prospero back again!"

In fact, Father Prospero reappeared on the threshold of the library. He had willingly gone towards the garden. He did not want to remain at San Bruno. The cuisine certainly had improved, owing to the prior who had divined the gastronomical tastes of his most precious guest. But the excellence of the cuisine did not weigh enough when placed in the balance with the total absence of any amusement. Father Prospero was a man who liked to live quietly, but not in solitude which is only suited to

those who are able to suffice for themselves. And then that danger! But after all was there any real danger? Not even the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo with his Francavilla *in pectore* had been able to say anything against Father Anacleto. He was not very rich, at least not so rich as his niece; but that was her affair. In short, if they liked each other—if they liked each other and mutually confessed it, it was reasonable to suppose that Father Anacleto's priorship would soon be ended and his convent life also. This brilliant conclusion caused Father Prospero, instead of going on towards the garden, suddenly to turn round and go back to the library.

"What is the meaning of this? Why did you not go?" asked his importunate companions, one after the other.

"Gentlemen, I have thought better of it. Whatever the prior does is sure to be right and what pleases my niece pleases me. I

have spoken, and now I am going to sleep. At least, if I can go to sleep again after your interruptions."

And Father Prospero was as good as his word. He went and stretched himself out in his easy-chair and would not listen to anything more.

CHAPTER VI.

The reader, who has accompanied me so far with a patience and courtesy for which I am really grateful, will be anxious to know what Father Anacleto, prior of San Bruno, and the little monk Adelindo were talking about. He has seen them stand still, walk side by side, again stand still, always seeming engrossed in conversation, and certainly he imagines that they were discussing grave matters.

But for the present it was nothing of the kind. Indeed I must confess that that manner of walking and gesticulating was only a device planned by both persons, who did not wish to be followed. It was like the trick two friends will play when they wish to avoid the interruption of a third—of the troublesome third, as he has been baptized by custom.

The misfortune was that this pantomime,

which was to keep their companions at a distance, made the little father laugh, and the prior laughed also. This was scarcely a good beginning for a serious dialogue, as you see! But then the mere sight of that charming little monk did away with the wish to talk of tiresome things, and brought instead that of enjoying them, as one enjoys a delicious marchpane.

Laughing like this they reached a stone seat shaded by a laurel tree. The fair-haired seraph stood still.

"What are these grave matters about which you have to speak to me, prior? Sit there as befits the dignity of your office, while I stand before you like the poor novice I am."

The words were said in joke, but they ill dissimulated a certain nervous anxiety which had taken possession of the little monk.

"But no," he continued, without giving the prior time to utter a word; "tell me first

of all why you did not join us up there at the hermitage of the Oaks?"

"It is I who play the part of novice and you who are the prior, Father Adelindo," observed Father Anacleto. "It is true also," he added in a low voice, "that I acted as a novice."

"Ah!" exclaimed the little father, who had heard his words. "Then you wish to confess?"

"This is how it happened," said the prior, with some confusion. "Having rid myself of the Sub-Prefect, I was anxious to know where you were, to inform you and your uncle of what had occurred. Brother Giocondo told me you were at the Oaks. I went up there and heard your voices. Just as I was approaching I perceived that Father Agapito was with you, and that did not suit me."

"Why?"

"How can you ask? Father Agapito was

in my way, considering the subject on which I had to speak to you."

This was not what the fair-haired seraph expected. However, he was obliged to be satisfied with it.

"Then was what the Sub-Prefect had to say very serious?" he asked, just to say something.

"Yes; judge for yourself. He came with the ostensible purpose of making my acquaintance, but in reality with the object, which he could not conceal, of speaking to me about certain inmates of San Bruno."

Thus saying, Father Anacleto fixed his eyes on the little monk to see what effect this exordium would have upon him, but the little monk stood before the prior erect, his eyes and nose in the air, and his under lip slightly projecting, with the evident intention of seconding the movement of eyes and nose. And when I say thus curtly eyes and nose, pray believe, my readers, that I am acting

against my inclination, and also a little against justice. Two epithets would be required for the eyes and the nose. As for the mouth, I swear by the lips of Saint John Chrysostom that no less than three would be necessary.

"For instance," continued Father Anacleto, seeing that the fair little monk was not the least disturbed by this beginning, "he told me that Signor Prospero Gentili is a gentleman of Castelnuovo Bedonia, a well-to-do man, and much respected in the town."

"Many thanks for his condescension!" exclaimed the little monk, who immediately resumed his devil-may-care expression.

"And he added," pursued Father Anacleto, "that Signor Prospero is the uncle and guardian of a lovely girl, Adele Ruzzani."

A deep blush overspread the fair-haired seraph's face, but there was no other sign of emotion, and he remained firm in his statuesque attitude.

"My sister," he said, looking up at the clouds.

"Ah!" exclaimed the prior, "your sister? And you have had the heart to leave her all alone?"

"Oh, there is no need of anyone to look after her," retorted the seraph without moving his head, but letting fall on Father Anacleto a glance half inquisitive, half scornful; "she is quite able to take care of herself. Perhaps she is vain, perhaps foolish; some indeed maintain that she is a little mad—"

"Ah, I should think that with so many fine qualities she is not badly off," observed Father Anacleto sarcastically.

But the little monk was prepared for the blow, and parried it before Father Anacleto was aware that he had aimed right.

"Take care, prior," said the little monk; "I do not admit anything which others maintain, and the best thing you can do, and

the most courteous above all, is to believe me. I only mean to say that, even admitting all that others, friends and enemies, like to say of her, Adele Ruzzani is a good girl. In this at least, prior, were you not just now of my opinion?"

"I willingly agree, though I am not acquainted with your sister; but this is not absolutely necessary if I may judge of her by you. Now answer me, and do not stand there looking at the clouds, I entreat you. Forget your home for a moment," added the prior with ready gallantry, which made the seraph smile while he lowered his eyes one degree. "How is it that you are at San Bruno, away from that home so dear to young men like you, and so safe also? And why leave her to come and shut yourself up in a society of melancholy people like us? What troubles can you have had?"

"I note the triumphant air with which you put this question to me," remarked the

seraph, with an expression half angry, half playful. "Of course, so young as I am, I cannot, I ought not to have any troubles. Therefore I shall not answer you very satisfactorily; I shall hesitate, I shall get confused, and you, with your authority as prior, will pity my condition. Undeceive yourself, prior; I can tell you my reason. From my infancy I have been accustomed to do as I like. It is a defect, I know, but I do not complain of it. However, you must know on this defect I have grafted a small quality. I always say what I think."

"This is a digression," observed Father Anacleto. "As portraying your character I gladly welcome it; as a lesson to myself I am not aware of having deserved it."

"Tiresome prior! It is neither a portrait nor a lesson," replied the seraph. "It was simply a preliminary declaration, after which I am immediately going to tell you my troubles. They are blended with those of my

sister; her sorrows are mine. Admit this personal resemblance, and the rest speaks for itself."

"I admit also the consubstantiality," said Father Anacleto. "Continue."

"By reason of that same consubstantiality which you have discovered so opportunely," observed the fair-haired monk, "my sister thinks exactly as I do. The principle of free criticism to which she has always adhered in every detail of life has served her instead of experience, and has helped her to see the deceptions with which her path is sown. She is not very ugly; at least, what she lacks in beauty she possesses in riches, and therefore many have come forward and asked her hand, and her family have talked of marrying her—"

"Ah!" exclaimed the prior involuntarily.

"Have you any objection?" asked the seraph, stopping short.

"If you object, so must I," said Father

Anacleto, correcting himself in time. "Do you not tell me that all these gallants and admirers were not worthy of her?"

"Really I never said so."

"But it is understood, and just the same as if you had said so. If not, why would you complain of certain interested lovers?"

"True," replied the little monk. "We will say then, not exactly that the matches were not good enough for her, but simply that she disliked them as she still dislikes them. Amongst others, the last was proposed to her in so pressing a manner, and under such circumstances, that she was bored to death about it."

"And was driven away from Castelnuovo, was she not?" inquired the prior cunningly; but the fair-haired seraph would not see the joke.

"She may be wrong," he continued. "I will also admit that the consciousness of wealth has spoilt her in some degree—not of

course by making her proud, you understand! Wealth only turns the heads of fools. People who reason only desire riches that they may procure themselves every possible satisfaction, moral and intellectual. Now my sister likes it for the satisfaction of travelling, of seeing continually new countries and new horizons. But she is a woman, poor thing. In a society so badly organised as ours, can you not understand the annoyance of being a woman? They say it is the best existence, and one must be resigned, but not without a protest, I promise you. Ah! happy men! You, for example, you, prior, have been able to realise your design. Society troubled you, and you have withdrawn from society. A woman cannot do this. Her wealth and her liberty, when she possesses both, are useless to her; they must be confiscated for the good of someone who is to come, who will be Titian or Caius, and whom she must choose out of the five or six

most importunate, while perhaps she would far rather have waited for the chance of becoming acquainted with Sempronius."

"Sempronius!" repeated the prior, in so sad a tone that the fair-haired seraph was struck by it.

"What is the matter, prior?" he asked, suddenly stopping. "Does this—ancient name displease you?"

"No, on the contrary! Continue."

And thus saying poor Father Anacleto sighed.

"Titian and Caius in my sister's case," remarked the little monk, pursuing his discourse, "represent fickleness, egotism, fortune hunting, masculine vulgarity, all the more revolting in proportion as they conceal themselves under the appearance of profound love, generated spontaneously like fungi, and grown gigantic in the space of a week. Sempronius, on the other hand, poor Sempronius, would be sincerity. True love, which is also generated spontaneously—"

"How can true love be divined if it is generated spontaneously like the other?" interrupted Father Anacleto.

"There are people who distinguish it as they distinguish edible from poisonous fungi," answered the little monk laughing. "It seems the poisonous ones shine more, display brighter colours. They wish to seduce,—the liars! On the other hand those others are more bashful, more humble, more timid; one would say that they love to hide themselves, to mingle with the dead leaves with which the ground is covered."

"This is also a trick easily learned," observed Father Anacleto, "and woe be to the poor seeker, if Titian and Caius take it into their heads to simulate Sempronius."

The little monk shook his head incredulously.

"No, they will not succeed," he said. "Experience in personal matters is soon acquired; and Titian and Caius, however they may dis-

simulate, will always betray themselves in some trifle. Sempronius's presence will always be divined when he is there. At least, such is my opinion."

"Divine him when he is there. I do not dispute it," retorted Father Anacleto. "But mind, Father Adelindo, it will be very difficult to discover him."

"I agree with you. My sister certainly has not found him. Bows, genuflexions, glances, sighs, convulsions, she has had in abundance; but they were all from Titian and Caius."

"Your poor sister!" exclaimed Father Anacleto. "I understand her dejection. And the last of the Titians and Caiuses, what has become of him?"

"The last? He was only just beginning. And he will begin in good earnest if my sister returns to Castelnuovo. Now you will understand why I do not wish to see her there. With the meddlesome world which always

will put in a word everywhere, with relations who object to spinsters at home, with all the tiresome gossip, with all the sarcastic remarks which crush a poor girl, you will comprehend, prior, that sooner or later one must make up one's mind. And it is sad to have to do it when one knows beforehand that the choice will be a bad one."

"Of course," said Father Anacleto, "when the young lady is waiting—to meet Sempronius. Does that mean that your sister's heart has not yet been touched!"

It was a bold question, and the fair-haired seraph was perplexed for a moment.

"Not that I know of," he said. "Perhaps later, after I left Castelnuovo."

"Ah! you think it possible that after your departure she met with a Sempronius? That would be a pity!" said Father Anacleto, who was thinking at that moment of Father Agapito gathering branches of fiammole under the hermitage of the Oaks. "I advise

your sister not to give away her heart so rashly. Men are worth so little!"

The seraph half-closed his eyes, and gave Father Anacleto a side glance which revealed his gay, malicious humour.

"Prior," he then said with that mixture of timidity and confidence which became him so well, "was it misanthropy which drove you to San Bruno? I really thought it was a different kind of melancholy."

"My brother," said the prior, "it was a little of everything."

"Tell me about it!"

"What would be the use?"

"Never mind that; do tell me I entreat you."

And thus saying, with a gesture of infantine curiosity the fair-haired seraph went and sat down by the side of Father Anacleto.

"Do not expect a narrative like the second book of the Eneid," answered the prior,

smiling. "I can dismiss the subject in a few words, for my story is a very common one. I thought I loved.

"And you were betrayed?" asked the seraph, interrupting him. "But there is material for two novels here."

"No, you are mistaken. You should let me finish! I thought I loved—and it was not true."

The seraph paused, pondering over Father Anacleto's words; then with an air of supreme candour, replied—

"I have been told that men always talk like that."

"Indeed? And who told you so, Father Adelindo?" asked the prior, raising his head and looking the seraph straight in the face. "Is it by chance the result of—your sister's experience?"

"There now, you are angry," observed the seraph, blushing. "I have really wounded you. But mind it was quite unintentional."

"I am not angry, and you have not wounded me," replied Father Anacleto. "You asked me to confess, and I have done so sincerely. But of course I ought to have understood that certain things speak for themselves."

"No, on the contrary, tell me everything. And you said it was not true. How did you discover that it was not true? And if you discovered that it was not true, why did you come and shut yourself up in this solitude?"

"Little father, little father, you are a most inquisitive person!" said the prior, evading a reply. "In my youth I knew a famous man of great intellect, and yet a child in his ingenuous ways. 'Why this?' 'Why that?' This was his habitual form of dialogue. If I said to him 'a fine day to-day!' he asked me immediately: 'Why do you say so?' 'But—because I think it is a fine day, and for no other reason.' 'No,' he would reply, 'there must be another; you cannot say a

fine day without having a deeper reason,' and so on. My illustrious friend had a mania for interrogation, so that I took upon myself to nominate him president of all the commissions of enquiry in the happy kingdom of Italy."

"Your friend must have been a most sympathetic person!" observed the seraph. "He had a mania for knowledge, therefore he deserves my highest esteem. And, prior, did you answer him as you are answering me, with continual evasions?"

"Silly little thing!" exclaimed Father Anacleto, glancing amorously at the seraph, and at the same time repressing a sigh. "You must be satisfied in spite of everything. Know that till then I had not discovered that it was not true. On the contrary at first I suffered a great deal. I thought I should never recover. Love—but excuse me, little father, these are not matters to talk to you about."

"Why?"

"Because you are young, very young, and have not yet passed through these tortures. And if you remain here you will not pass through them."

"Ah!" cried the seraph. "Shall I remain then?"

Father Anacleto started as if he had been suddenly awakened.

"Excuse me," he said, "I was not at that moment thinking of this necessity—which I regret. You must depart, Father Adelindo. For, indeed, why should you remain in the hermitage of San Bruno, in this solitude for premature old men, in this anticipated darkness, whilst around you all is bright, whilst every voice in creation salutes you and recalls you to life?"

"And whilst everything drives me from here, beginning with yourself; am I not right?" asked the seraph.

The prior paused, perplexed.

"No, that is not the case. I do not drive you away; it is the force of circumstances which urges you to return to the world."

"To find there the troubles of which you spoke just now?"

"No, you will not find them. If you are good, if you are sincere—you see, Signorina, I call you by your right title because this incognito cannot be kept up any longer. You see, Signorina, what does harm to you women is your wish to please. Excusable vanity I do not deny but which brings with it its unpleasant consequences. Men look upon you as slaves and you proclaim yourselves queens. You accept praise, adulation, incense, and you are the victims of this praise, of this adulation, of this perpetual incense. Thus it happens that while a hundred men are contented with an exchange of superficial affection which is all they have wished for, and you joyfully deceive yourselves, there is one who finds himself de-

ceived and suffers thereby, for your character has become trivial, and you have been unable to give to that one who asked it of you, sincerity, trust, that spirit of perfect sacrifice of your own will, of your own caprices without which there is no love true and lasting. Be pure as you are beautiful; do not take pleasure in the trivial triumphs of self love, and wait. The man worthy of you, that Sempronius of whom you spoke just now, will not be long in coming, and you will love him as he will love you. Neither he nor you will find it necessary to confess it to each other. Here, in the solitude of San Bruno a poor prior will pray for you, and will rejoice to know you are happy."

The fair-haired seraph had listened to the sermon very devoutly. But when Father Anacleto had finished he jumped up and replied with emotion—

"Come away! The world calls you, do you not hear it, prior? The grasshoppers

have ceased chirping, the crickets have not yet begun. But the voices of the world speak to you as they speak to me. What are you doing with your youth, you, who counsel others? You have not really loved. They are your own words, and I do not think you a liar. Come away then and do not stay moping in this hermitage!"

"Seraph! Seraph!" exclaimed Father Anacleto, "I have not yet told you all. For man, life is not wholly composed of love. Our nature is more complex, only too much so; we have a variety of duties to perform which happily you have not. Know then that there are many other causes which made me hold civil society in detestation. You do not believe this? However, it is so. When one sees envy in the place of emulation, egotism in the place of brotherly love—"

The seraph immediately interrupted these sad considerations by shrugging his shoulders.

"Return to the other cause, pray," he added. "What you now touch upon is not worth much, in fact it is not worth anything. How many times in your life have you found —that it was not true?"

For a moment Father Anacleto paused perplexed. But the little monk's scrutinising eyes were upon him. Therefore, having promptly come to a determination he answered—

"Several times; suppose we say five."

"Ah, so much the better," said the little monk after having also acted his little by-play. "If you had said once only you would have frightened me."

"Frightened you! Why?"

"Because—why do you ask the reason? I thought you would not ask me that," answered the little monk, half angry, half confused.

Father Anacleto perceived nothing but the anger.

"Forgive me if I have offended you," he said. "I am rather ignorant. I live so out of the world that some shades of delicacy are unknown to me now. If I am to understand by your manner—if I conjecture the truth—somebody I know of would present himself to my mind."

"Somebody! Who?"

"Father Agapito, for instance."

"Ah, there is your suspicion!" exclaimed the little father with a pause which indicated the wish to use another epithet. "Are you suspicious?"

"Fiercely," said Father Anacleto, meaning to reply to the epithet, which was suppressed. "And this is precisely a reason for remaining here, away from the world and its temptations. Suspicious and eccentric, that is, born to be unhappy. Do you not think that I am right in living apart?"

"Well," answered the little monk, smiling more maliciously than ever, "it seems to

me that in certain matters you are a little—"

And he stopped, waiting for the other to complete the phrase. Father Anacleto obeyed this tacit invitation.

"Vile, did you mean to say? Yes, tell me frankly that I am vile. At least I shun the ridiculous. I do not proclaim the secret of my frailties to the crowd. I shut myself up in this life, lonely as regards both mind and heart. I appear happy, and I secure peace."

"The peace of the grave; truly a fine thing!" exclaimed the seraph. "And do you think you are doing your duty? On the contrary, I should go further. Do you think you have no debt towards the world, that you thus act with impunity? Prior, permit a woman, a child, to try and give you a lesson; you will tell me afterwards if I am wrong, and I will bow to your judgment. You, who are taught by experience,

will instruct me in the mysteries of life, in the battles which are unknown to me, in the baseness, more or less cunning, which I instinctively abhor, and before which I have hitherto closed my eyes. I am a woman, and cannot and ought not to see everything. But I can tell you from conjecture. You know the most famous oracles were women."

"You have mounted the tripod, my beautiful pythoness; speak," answered Father Anacleto.

"Very well; I tell you then, that life is a battle, you must make up your mind to accept it as such. The soldier who runs away from danger is no soldier. Whatever his reasons may be, were they even those of Achilles, to retreat to his tent, never has been, and never will be praiseworthy. Do you know why you are born? And if you do not know, why do you live as though you were not born, depriving nature of one force out of the concert of forces which she needs?

As you see I have also read my books," said the seraph laughing. "I have no experience of my own; but I profit by that of others. Listen, prior, God troubled Himself to give His Commandments to man."

"Ten. And I do not disobey one of them."

"But the eleventh? This is what I want you to notice. There is the eleventh which sums up all the others; or to speak more correctly, the ten which you know of imply an eleventh and last."

"Ah, indeed? And pray what is the eleventh?"

"This is it. I do not know whether I express it rightly, but you will correct me, you will put it into proper shape and have it inscribed on the tables of the law. 'Thou shalt continue in the companionship of thy fellows, live the same life, love and suffer with them, for it is not given thee to withdraw thyself from the common law.'"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Father Anacleto

ironically. "But where is the penalty. There is no law worth anything without its penal sanction. I hope you are not going to threaten me with the punishments of another life."

"Those also, if necessary," answered the seraph. "But there is a penalty here also, without doubt."

"And what is it?"

"Think about it, Father Anacleto, think about it. And meanwhile we will return to your decision. Am I to depart or remain?"

Father Anacleto looked at the fair little monk who had put him in a corner as though he were dazed. He had meant to give him a lesson, and had received one instead. And as if that was not enough, after having reduced him to this, the malicious little father said to him almost in a tone of raillery—

"It is for you to remember why you made me come to this colloquy; am I to remain or depart?"

Depart! It was soon said. That had indeed been the prior's first idea. But why on earth did the little monk take it into his head to recall Father Anacleto to the fulfilment of a duty, just at the moment he was forgetting it. Remain indeed! How could he tell him to remain after the Sub-Prefect's revelations, and the knowledge of it, which all the recluses of San Bruno possessed? And that penalty in the life here below. What could that penalty be? And why must he think about it, in order to guess it? Would it not have been better to take the shortest road, and tell him frankly?

Disturbed by all these doubts Father Anacleto jumped up and began to walk up and down the avenue; with precipitate steps of course, rolling his eyes and biting his lips. This biting his lips and rolling his eyes and behaving like a wild beast, is certainly one way of seeking an idea, but I ought to add, from love of truth, that the result is not

always effectual. A fierce battle was raging in Father Anacleto's soul. The days gone by were all passing before him, ever changing without ceasing, like the strange forms of a kaleidoscope. He saw the days in which he had loved and suffered, thanked heaven and cursed. Yes, even cursed, for man is not an angel, and he always requires to give fierce vent to his passions. Had he ever really loved? Just now, when answering the seraph, he had said no, and had thought he spoke the truth. But whatever the degree might be, he had loved; we may say, however, that he had loved according to his age, with greater levity from vanity and sensualism; but at any rate, he had loved and had suffered as deeply as if that love had been the greatest, the most solemn of his whole life. But at that moment and involuntarily analysing his feelings, Father Anacleto observed that he had never been so oppressed by two thoughts at the same

time, first of all that of the shame of confessing himself weak to a woman who had entirely concealed her own feelings and could enjoy a laugh at him; and besides, that of the vow of the San Bruno community, which even though it did not make a monk of him, none the less impugned his honour as a gentleman. And then those tiresome shadows of his companions, who had fallen in love with the seraph. And that wreath of fiammole placed by Father Agapito's hands on that fair little head, which had driven him out of his senses. Heavens! Not yet to possess the certainty of being loved, and to be already so fiercely suspicious. But what absurd suspicions! There in his secret conscience this hypocrisy was not to be tolerated. Jealous, I ought to have said, fiercely, infernally jealous.

Father Anacleto belonged to that class of men in whom imagination predominates, and who therefore suffer twice as much as others.

The mind invents for itself terrors and constant suspicions, and causes them to echo in the heart. Men thus constituted, fear that they are not loved even under circumstances in which every other son of Adam would believe himself to be the lord of creation. I say the lord of creation, because it is a fact that the man who is conscious of being loved or has the illusion thereof, always flies in thought to this height of felicity, which is the empire of the world. Not thus the imaginative of whom I have spoken; they doubt always and about everything. Perhaps they are keener-sighted than others, for, let us go to the root of the matter, who is there whose affection is sincere, even when it is affirmed to be so in words? Are we not all changeable beings, according to our impressions? And is it not possible that a woman, already yours in part, indeed, wholly yours, may change at any moment? The caprices which actuate us are not to be defined just as those

quantities which turn the balance are not to be weighed. The more subtle the combination, the more subject it is to external influences.

Suppose, however, that Father Anacleto was not thinking at all about what I have been explaining. He was walking up and down, not thinking in fact; he was like a tipsy man looking for a thread, and unable to find it, who, by reason of the confused ideas which present themselves to his mind, sees several threads, and cannot lay hold of any.

Once he stopped in front of the seraph, as though he wished to speak to him; then suddenly turned round again, and continued his walk. He immediately regretted having done so, and turned back; stopped again, and the words trembled on his lips.

"I love you," he wished to say.

But no, it was a vulgar phrase, and then, even if he had said it, what answer would he have received?

Supposing the little fair-haired monk had laughed in his face? Therefore he said nothing, and contented himself with looking the seraph straight in the face. And the seraph gazed at him with a steadfastness almost amounting to mockery, as if he meant to say—

"Oh, if you don't begin, my good prior, I certainly shall not speak."

At length, for all things have an end here below, even the battles of a soul in love, Father Anacleto came to a decision. Perhaps it was the worst; but have pity on him, he was not free to choose.

"You are right," he said, "you will depart."

"Ah!" exclaimed the seraph.

Father Anacleto repented his words directly, but it was too late. However, the seraph's exclamation did not signify regret; it was brief, without expression, without meaning; it might even be interpreted as a cry of joy.

"You will leave to-morrow if that suits you," said Father Anacleto. "After all, it is best so. And tell me—where shall you go?"

"To Castelnuovo," replied the seraph bending his head.

I may add that he bent his head to hide his blushes. But in truth if I said so, I could not prove it. Nor would it have been necessary at that hour. The shades of night were creeping over the convent garden. The crickets were beginning to chirp all around. And poor Father Anacleto felt a great wish to send them all to the devil.

CHAPTER VII.

"But really, now we have left, may I not ask the reason of our going away so suddenly without even saying good-bye?"

"Don't ask me anything, uncle! We are going away."

"After having come here, I certainly believe it was the best thing we could do."

"Ah yes, I did wrong in coming. If I had only obeyed you!"

"The confession is tardy but valuable. I shall remind you of it on future occasions The Arctic pole! The Equator! I am not going to the Pole you know: or to the Equator either."

"No, do not be afraid; we shall not go anywhere again. I have become quite domesticated. Henceforward we will not stir from Castelnuovo."

"There, that is running into another extreme. I have never objected to a little trip in Christian countries. And suppose we now made an excursion to Turin, or Milan, or Venice."

"No, I am determined to remain at Castelnuovo. Have we not all we want there? You have all you are accustomed to; and I have my books, flowers, paint-brushes. Do you know, uncle, life may even be enjoyable like this? Indeed, I think it is only enjoyable so. An author has said the most beautiful thing in the world is light; next to that immediately follows green."

"He must be mad."

"No, indeed! He meant to say that the greatest pleasure is experienced through the eyes. Seeing is knowing."

"That may be by means of light. But green! How can green come second, if it is already included in the seven colours of the prism."

"True. But in speaking of green, the author meant the sight of the country."

"Your author requires too many explanations. And I only hope he is not Dante. But let us change the subject. Don't you think it is a mistake to go to Castelnuovo?"

"We are already on our way, and wherever you may wish to go, you must first go home."

"I know, but we can go home and then rush off again to-day or to-morrow. Listen child, the gossip of Castelnuovo terrifies me. We ought to let a month pass before seeing all those troublesome people, or at least a fortnight of which we could give them an account. Meanwhile, in our temporary abode, we could see, we could arrange—"

"No, don't mention it to me; I will not."

"'Will not' is a very poor reason."

"And then it is too hot to travel."

"Oh! that is one which is really serious.

As if here, close by and wearing the convent tunic it was cool!"

This dialogue and the remainder which we omit for the sake of brevity, took place between Signor Prospero Gentili and his fair niece Adele Ruzzani, at the dawn of day while they were descending the road between the bridge of San Bruno and the plain below, where a carriage was in waiting for our two personages.

They had quitted the convent at five in the morning. Father Anacleto had ordered the carriage to be there on the preceding evening, immediately after the colloquy in the garden. It was necessary to see about it in good time because carriages could not drive up there, the ancient monks never having thought of making a carriage road up to the top of the hill.

I leave you to conjecture how the modern monks received the information of that departure. They had not noticed or even

suspected anything that evening because Father Anacleto had dealt the blow silently like the wise and prudent man he was. Poor Father Anacleto! His prudence and wisdom had not saved him from internal storms. All that night, which was the fair-haired little monk's last in the convent, Father Anacleto had passed hours of torture. He was already beginning to pay the penalty of transgressing the eleventh commandment, which the fair little monk would not name, leaving to him the trouble of guessing it. And the torment of his soul augmented when five o'clock in the morning struck and a noise of footsteps in the passage reached him: sure sign of an expected departure. A few minutes after five there was a knock at the door of his cell. He had opened it and Brother Giocondo had handed him a visiting card, a sad farewell from the guests who had just before taken their departure. On the card was written as follows:—

PROSPERO GENTILI

And his niece Adele Ruzzani thank Father Anacleto, prior of San Bruno, for the courteous hospitality offered to them. They will remember it with gratitude and will always be glad to see their friend at Castelnuovo Bedonia, (*Palace Ruzzani, Saint Michael's Street, No.* 8), *if he does not forget his grateful Novices and Friends.*

Signor Prospero's name was of course printed, the rest was written in a delicate hand-writing which could not be that of Signor Prospero.

"Ah, seraph! seraph!" exclaimed Father Anacleto sighing, after reading it twice over.

It was useless to wait for sleep, which the livelong night had refused to visit Father Anacleto. The prior quitted his cell and went to walk in the cloisters. The place was deserted and worse still without light, although the first rays of the sun were beginning to make their appearance. But you will

perfectly well understand that we are speaking in metaphor, following Father Anacleto's thoughts who at that moment called to mind the words of Dante :

" *To venni in loco d'ogni luce muto,*" and he might very soon afterwards have added the two following lines which complete the triplet :—

" *Che mugghia come fa mar per tempesta*
Se da contrarii venti è combattuto."

In fact that morning at breakfast Father Anacleto was surrounded by his recluses who began to pester him with questions.

" Father Prior ! "

" Well ? "

" The novices ? "

" They left this morning."

" How did they leave ? "

" But—in the most natural way. On foot as far as the bottom of the hill, where they found a carriage in waiting to take them to Castelnuovo. Gentlemen," added the prior,

seeing that this brief account did not satisfy his hearers, "after what had happened yesterday morning—"

"What happened?"

"You know very well; my colloquy with the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo. After that conversation of which I informed you directly, you understand that they could not remain at San Bruno."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Father Restituto.

"Ah, I think so too," answered the prior.

"It is a pity," replied Father Restituto, "that you had recourse to this extreme measure before listening—"

"To what? Your opinions? I was aware of them already from what was said, and at length, in the last assembly of the chapter."

"There is something else besides the chapter!" cried Father Restituto. "If you will condescend to remember what was said

yesterday before we went into the refectory, I myself, who at first did not like the presence of the novices amongst us, frankly confessed to being converted by your arguments."

"It was politeness on your part," said the prior, bowing. "There was also a personal opinion."

"Which we all shared," put in Father Agapito. "Besides," he added immediately, so as not to be outdone by anyone, "and just because there was a talk of conversions, you might have waited a day and an hour."

"The convent was not on fire!" exclaimed Father Ilarione.

"Here is another!" said the prior, trying to laugh, but feeling much more disposed to send the whole pack of them to the devil.

"And yet another, and another till we are unanimous," retorted Father Ilarione. "Excuse me, prior, but you were the only one

who saw any necessity to send away the novices; we others had already made up our minds to keep them."

"But what on earth was to be done with them?" cried the prior, who had nearly lost patience. "I cannot believe that it entered your heads to make two monks of them!"

"And why not? They came here on purpose!"

"Come, gentlemen, let us talk seriously if possible. We had in courtesy lent ourselves to a woman's caprice, that is all. An Order like ours is not founded with impunity, without awaking people's curiosity. A charming and very romantic girl took it into her head to see the convent; she found means to evade the watchword, or the convent word, if I may so speak. We did not recognise her immediately, therefore she was able to remain with us. But, gentlemen, confess, since the matter was discovered, rather since we were solemnly informed of it, was it

prudent on our part, was it wise to say to that girl remain? And in a convent of men?"

"Of knights, you said so yourself," observed Father Agapito.

"Yes, in order not to dismiss the little father till we were certain about him. But yesterday, gentlemen, we received an official notice, and Father Adelindo's own confession."

"Confession received by you" repeated Father Agapito ironically.

The prior had almost lost his temper.

"Pray what do you mean by that?"

"That made to you alone, the confession was insufficient. We alone, assembled in chapter, had the right to expel the novices. And you, acting on your own responsibility, make one suspect—"

"Signor Mario Novelli!" interrupted the prior.

"Make one suspect," pursued Father

Agapito angrily, "that in such delicate matters" (and he emphasized the epithet) "you did not care to have our advice."

"Signor Mario Novelli!" repeated the prior, raising his voice.

But the other had already lost his head.

"Mario Novelli! Mario Novelli!" he repeated, also raising his voice, "what new idea is this to call me to-day by my own name as a gentleman?"

"Precisely to recall you to your duty as a gentleman," replied Father Anacleto. "You have insulted me, and I call your colleagues to witness it. Signor Mario Novelli," continued the prior severely, "affixed to the wall of my cell are two swords of Toledo, and two canes of Lepage. And this is to signify to you that though I may listen to the remarks of all, I do not admit the insinuations of any one."

"What shall we do?" cried Father Marcellino in the midst of the tumult which the

prior's words had awakened in the community. "This is the finishing stroke."

"Count Gualandi del Poggio," meanwhile answered Father Agapito, or if you like better, Signor Mario Novelli, "I am at your service."

"No, no, it is impossible!" cried several, trying to interfere. "Calm yourselves, gentlemen! Do not let us have any scandal."

"It is necessary," answered Father Restituto. "The prior has given provocation."

"What do you mean by provocation!" retorted Father Anselmo. "He defended himself against an outrageous suspicion."

The quarrel was becoming rife, even between the subordinate parties. But the prior cut it short, saying gravely—

"I beseech you, gentlemen! I am yet your superior, for a few hours at least. Do me the favour to remain neutral, and allow me to settle the questions which concern

me. Signor Mario Novelli," he continued, turning to Father Agapito, "here are my seconds: Signor Giorgio Verna and Signor Nello Altoviti."

Thus saying he indicated Father Anselmo and Father Bonaventura.

Father Agapito bowed, and turning to the two mentioned, said to them—

"Be kind enough to make arrangements with my seconds: Signor Pellegrina della Rosa and Signor Ariodante Soresi."

Thus saying he pointed to Father Ilarione and Father Restituto. And these two having made a formal bow, moved away with the others, indicated by the prior.

Thus, for a little father who had fled from San Bruno, were four fathers disturbed in the convent, but of quite a different species, and, be it said, without any intention of giving offence they were much less handsome than the first.

Calm had succeeded to tumult: a solemn

calm, the calm of great preparations. Most of the friars were whispering together, but the interest of the scene was all centred in that group of four who were arranging the conditions of the meeting. These also were whispering, for an important matter was being decided by them, and on it depended the fate of two men.

After having chosen his seconds, Father Anacleto had gone into the garden. When he reached the intersection of the paths where the preceding evening that important dialogue already narrated had taken place, he thought it advisable to sit down on that stone bench which I have pointed out. But not in the same place as on the preceding evening, a little farther off towards the corner.

Childishness you will say ; but life is interwoven with these puerilities. If you think about it a little, if you question your recollections, I am sure you will admit this also.

Father Anacleto had no time to recall the memories of the place, for Father Anselmo and Father Bonaventura joined him almost directly.

"Well?" he asked, as soon as they appeared.

"It is arranged," they replied.

"Time, arms, and place?"

"What an alfierian phrase! We will imitate you by replying: at once, swords, here."

"Thanks!" said Father Anacleto. "Then we will wait for them."

"Here they are," answered Father Anselmo, pointing through the bushes whence Father Agapito could be seen, followed by Fathers Restituto and Ilarione. Serious, both of them, were Mario Novelli's seconds, serious as befitted the dignity of the office and the solemnity of the moment. One of them, Father Restituto, carried the two swords of Toledo, recently detached from the wall in Father Anacleto's cell.

"Count," he said, "we have chosen yours for a very simple reason. There were no others in the convent good enough. However, though you may have handled them some years ago, it seems that you have not practised with them during the two years you have been at San Bruno."

"I have not touched them," answered Father Anacleto. "Besides, these two swords have never been used by me. They were a precious souvenir from an intimate friend, and I have never been willing to part with them."

"Very well," replied Father Restituto. "Signor Novelli also declares that he has been out of practice for a year. Therefore the conditions seem sufficiently equal."

Having said these and a few other words with the cold courtesy analogous to the occasion, the seconds chose the ground close by and assigned to the combatants their respective places. Meanwhile Father Tranquillo,

physician and surgeon to the community, made use of the seat to place there his case of instruments duly open. Brother Giocondo, appointed his assistant, had gone to fetch some water from the fountain, and returned with his pail full, at the same time glancing from side to side with an inexpressibly foolish air.

Father Anselmo being the one most accustomed to these affairs was unanimously named director of the combat. Immediately assuming the dignity of the office he forthwith took the two swords, measured them, and after having crossed them at the thick end of the blade, handed them to Father Restituto. And the latter, instructed by the director of the combat, presented them by their hilts to the two combatants. Count Gualandi del Poggio took one with perfect indifference, and the other fell to the share of Signor Mario Novelli.

"Gentlemen," then said Father Anselmo,

advancing with a foil in his hand as symbol of his authority, "we would willingly have decreed that the encounter should cease at the first drawing of blood, it being a question of provocation given without rancour in a moment of passion, and after all between ourselves. But, as this weapon with very little variety of strokes has a great variety of consequences, to say at the first drawing of blood would mean nothing, for it might happen that a violent blow on some important muscle would be rendered more serious by the continuation of the duel than a real thrust, though it might not penetrate more than two or three centimetres. Pray excuse this language, which is certainly scarcely agreeable, but it is necessary to make the matter clear. We have therefore deemed it better to leave the cessation of the combat to the surgeon's arbitration, who will decide according to the serious nature of the lesions."

Brother Giocondo pressed his stomach with an involuntary movement of his hands. He almost fancied he had received one of those thrusts which Father Anselmo called by the generic and almost innocent name of lesions. Meanwhile he continued to glance around as though he expected someone. The Carabineers perhaps?

In the meantime the two adversaries, with the points of their swords turned to the ground, bowed in sign of assent.

Father Anselmo continued in these words—

"Gentlemen, you must strictly obey my commands. I shall stop you whenever I think one of you is wounded or has need of taking breath. You are both out of practice, and so even this may happen. We are agreed," concluded Father Anselmo. "Gentlemen, remember this; fight loyally. Now then!"

The signal given, accompanied by a raising

of the foil which served him as staff of command, the director of the combat drew back a step to allow the swords free play.

Strange coincidence! The duel was taking place in front of that stone seat where the little fair-haired monk had sat on the preceding evening! Where was he at that moment, and of what was the little friar thinking? If he could only have imagined what was taking place on his account! Father Anacleto glanced at that seat, and he seemed to see him there with his angelic face gazing intently at the scene. Ah, adorable little monk! At which of the two adversaries were you looking most tenderly? Father Anacleto could not quite distinguish, perhaps because the evening before, at the remembrance of Father Agapito, the fair little monk had preserved a discreet silence. But you know the proverb—silence reveals nothing.

Nevertheless doubt was by no means pleasant. And Father Anacleto, or if you prefer

it, Count Gualandi del Poggio, gave his opponent a glance, a glance which seemed as though it would pierce him through and through, but directly afterwards he smiled, as one must smile when about to kill one's fellow-creature or be killed by him. He extended his right arm, raised his left, inclining the palm of his hand towards his head, and fell into an attitude of self-defence so gracefully that it was evident he had formerly been accustomed to arms and had been a proficient in the science.

You will perhaps fancy that now Brother Giocondo not only compressed his stomach, but straightway gave himself up for dead. Undeceive yourselves. Precisely at that moment Brother Giocondo uttered a cry of delight, which made the two combatants turn round.

"What is the matter?" said the prior,

But before the lay brother could reply the recluses of San Bruno rushed out of an

avenue, eight in number, because the other six were on the ground and the two novices had departed; eight in number, but inclined to make noise enough for sixteen. They must have planned this interruption together, and also have concealed themselves behind a row of cypresses in time to jump out at the right moment, prepared to be abused, but to put a stop to everything.

"We will not allow this duel!" they cried. "We will not allow it! We will not allow it!"

Father Anacleto made a gesture of annoyance.

"Gentlemen, I entreat you," he said. "You have no business here; remember the obligations of knighthood."

"Knighthood, nonsense! Here there is friarhood, and nothing else. The Templars who were both friars and knights have been dead a long time."

"Then," added Father Marcellino, who

appeared to be the leader of the band, "the first duty of a knight is to know how to reason. And you, be it said with your permission, either do not know or will not, which comes to the same thing."

"Be it so; we will not," answered the prior. "Therefore you see that it is not worth while to teach us anything more."

And he prepared again to place himself in a posture of defence. But the space between him and Father Agapito was occupied. It was necessary to run through several persons before reaching his opponent's breast.

"Let us hear him by all means," said Father Restituto, seeing that there was no way of getting rid of these importunate monks.

"Perhaps there is some news," observed Father Tranquillo.

"Yes, we have also some news," answered Father Marcellino, catching at the expression. "We have come to preach

peace, and to remind you of the inhabitants of Castelnuovo, who will make use of this scandal to say all the evil they can of our convent."

"They can say what they like," muttered Father Anacleto. "I don't care a rap."

"It is all very well for you, but not so for us who are not in a rage. The convent, gentlemen—"

"What convent? The convent may go to the devil!" cried Father Agapito, not wishing to be outdone by his adversary.

"Ah, a good idea!" replied Father Marcellino. "The convent may go to the devil! That is, turning your exclamation into elegant phraseology, let us dissolve our community. I do not oppose the plan, for see, gentlemen, the devil has forced an entrance. Peace has departed, and nothing will bring it back to us. Besides, without that woman who left this morning, there is

neither life nor light any longer at San Bruno, but darkness as the Psalmist says, darkness and the shadow of death."

The duellists remained dumbfounded; Father Restituto was amazed.

"You, Father Marcellino!" he exclaimed. "Is it you who speak thus?"

"I! yes I! And what did you think—that I was made of stone? It is true that I am the most tranquil of all of us, not excepting Father Tranquillo, who has his instruments in readiness. But I have a heart, I have a heart—like you Restituto, like you Agapito, and you Ilarione, Bonaventura, and Anselmo, who have all fallen in love. Deny it if you like. Follow the fine example of Peter in the praetorium at Jerusalem! It is a pity there is no cock to crow thrice! But I will do that; I will act the cock of the gospel! You, Agapito, while the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo was in conversation with the prior, had rushed yesterday morning to the

Oaks, following the steps of the novices, and not for love of the old novice, that we know. And you, Restituto, what were you doing meanwhile? You were wandering about asking everybody where friend Agapito had gone, and not for want of the friend, that we know also. And all of you, Agapito, Restituto, Ilarione, with some others in addition, pray what were you doing while the prior was talking with Father Adelindo advising him to give us this unpleasant morning? You were all trying to rouse the uncle Prospero and send him into the garden to interrupt a colloquy which made you all furious. Deny it if you dare! You wished to thwart an action considered necessary by our prior, by the only one of us who had not lost his head, by the only one of us who had not fallen in love with the little fair-haired monk."

The listeners were overwhelmed by this oratorical assault. They wanted to speak—

to interrupt the torrent of disclosures, but they could not succeed. Father Marcellino had begun, and meant to go on to the end, but even he was obliged to stop a moment to take breath, and now the prior interrupted him.

"You are mistaken, Marcellino," he said gravely. "I am more in love than they are —more in love than all of you put together."

"Oh! oh!" they exclaimed in chorus.

"There is no use in saying 'oh!'" replied Father Anacleto. "Desperately in love! Father Marcellino has set the example of confessions; receive mine."

Father Agapito was not filled with astonishment as were the others. For several days he had suspected that the prior was in love with the fair-haired seraph, and for the last twenty-four hours he suspected something more, namely, that his love was reciprocated. He had become aware of this

from a certain conversation which had taken place at the Oaks, whence he had returned to the convent looking so ill-humoured, as I have already had the honour of mentioning to you. Up there near the hermitage where, in order to avoid the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo's visit, they had gone to spend the morning, the fair-haired seraph could hardly talk of any subject but Father Anacleto. At first Father Agapito had not taken any notice of it, and had given all the information about the prior of San Bruno, which the seraph seemed to ask merely out of curiosity. But subsequently, wishing to lead the conversation to more familiar topics, and not succeeding because the seraph always returned to the first subject, he had become suspicious, then altogether put out, and although the seraph accepted his wreath of fiammole, this was not sufficient to clear Signor Mario Novelli's brow. Therefore just imagine the state of mind he was in to-

wards evening, when the prior was conversing with the seraph, and how willingly the following morning he had given vent to his feelings, even going so far as to cause Father Anacleto to lose patience and to provoke a challenge.

He was therefore not surprised at the prior's confession in itself, but rather at the good-humoured frankness with which it had been made. And he wished, as the saying is, to have it all out.

"Do you love?" he said; "and—are you happy?"

"I do not understand your question," answered the prior.

Father Agapito shrugged his shoulders in sign of anger.

"I ask you if you are loved in return," he replied.

"Loved in return! I don't know."

"What? You don't know! That is strange."

"Why? I know nothing, and for a simple reason. I asked no questions, so there was no need of a reply.

"Ah, that is a good one!" exclaimed Father Ilarione. "You were three hours confessing the little monk, and you asked him no questions?"

"Do you doubt my word?" asked Father Anacleto. "Suppose that I have been a fool, and you will know the truth."

"The prior is right," put in Father Marcellino.

"Thanks!" answered the prior, bowing.

"Oh, not about the patent of fools, which you have taken out for yourself," replied Father Marcellino; "but as regards the respect which your affirmation deserves. You say a thing is not, and we ought all to believe you. You have never given us cause to suspect the contrary."

"True, true!" they all exclaimed. "Even Father Agapito must agree to this."

"I will do more, gentlemen," said Father Agapito, confused. "Father Anacleto, Count Gualandi, will you shake hands?"

Father Anacleto embraced him amidst the applause of the whole community.

This friendly embrace melted Father Agapito into the former Mario Novelli; the applause of his colleagues puzzled him. Even he felt impelled to candour and magnanimity.

"I may tell the prior and all of you," he began, "that each one is free to pay his addresses to the seraph. But alas, gentlemen! the seraph's heart is already given away. Yesterday morning, while I was trying to curry favour, I was forced to perceive this melancholy fact. I hinted at Agapito, but was answered Anacleto. So much so, that I was vexed, and proposed returning to the convent. Prior, jealousy is an ugly thing. But it shall not stifle my conscience. You are a knight, and you are also better

than I am. Yes, let me say it, better than I am. You have not spoken, and Signorina Ruzzani has quitted San Bruno. I, on the contrary, endeavoured to speak, and was not listened to. This is my confession, as sincere as yours. Let us be at peace, prior?"

"By all means," said Father Anacleto. "I will only ask you one thing, to omit the title. I will not be prior; I will be the humblest of the monks of San Bruno. Remember, all of you, that I said so some time ago."

"It is nobly done!" cried Father Restituto. "But suppose we accept Father Marcellino's proposition? Suppose we dissolve the community? Gentlemen, you all know, you all feel what Father Marcellino said; the devil has entered here, there is no longer any peace or happiness where there is no light. I had thought the same for some time; we reckoned without the voice of Nature."

"The Eleventh Commandment," exclaimed the prior. "Do you say so, too?"

"What do you mean by eleventh? What commandment?"

"Certainly! 'Thou shalt continue in the companionship of thy fellows; live the same life; love and suffer with them; because it is not given thee to withdraw thyself from the common law.' This is the eleventh, commandment, it has been revealed to me," said Father Anacleto.

"On Sinai?" inquired Father Ilarione.

"On Tabor," said Father Marcellino, laughing. "Do you not see that our prior is transfigured? In fact, he has seen the truth; he has found himself face to face with it. And now, gentlemen, listen. These lay convents may be instituted for a joke, and to last a season. But instituted seriously, to pass in them one's whole life, they become more hateful than those of old, where, at least with the mortification of the flesh,

came the hope of eternal felicity. Let us return to the world, gentlemen; we will give the convent of San Bruno, our joint property, to the Society of Good Works; the scientific collection to the schools of Castelnuovo. We can arrange about the other details; meanwhile, I propose the following motion:—'The community of San Bruno is dissolved.'"

A cry, a roar of approbation greeted Father Marcellino's proposal.

"It is time to put away these instruments," said Father Tranquillo.

And he shut up the case.

CHAPTER VIII.

The return of Signorina Ruzzani and her most excellent uncle, Signor Prospero Gentili, could not remain hidden from the inhabitants of Castelnuovo. From San Michele Street, where the carriage had stopped, the news immediately spread to all quarters of the town. Certainly there were but two quarters, High Castelnuovo and Low Castelnuovo; but I mean to say to all the streets and through all the circles of those who are wont to occupy themselves with their neighbours' affairs.

The morning after their arrival, Signor Prospero Gentili made his official appearance in the streets of High Castelnuovo, where dwelt the *élite* of the local society, in the most respectable mansions, beginning with the Castle, where the sub-prefecture was

established, with all its dependent offices, the hotel of the well-known *Cross of Malta*, the great square of the *Signori*, and the *White Rose* Inn, which was the refuge of the idlers of the capital.

Signor Prospero at once met half a dozen of these latter, and he was not sorry for it; what was the use? Now the folly had been committed, the consequences must be borne philosophically. Listen, for instance, to this little dialogue which he had with Count Gamberini.

"Oh, Signor Prospero! Welcome back from—"

Certainly, from— Many thanks; are all well at home?"

"Very well. And how is Signorina Adele? Did she enjoy herself at— Oh! well, Signor Prospero, may we know where you have been? To Turin, perhaps?"

"Turin, to be sure. Turin and other places."

"Ah! to other places?"

"To be sure, from one place to another, like the Wandering Jew. We do not often go away from Castelnuovo— I, at least, do not care to leave this little place; but when once I am away, you see, I am quite capable of going to the end of the world."

"To the Pole," for instance.

"Or to the Equator; nothing less. But this time I avoided extremes," said Signor Prospero, involuntarily heaving a sigh of contentment. "Pray, Don Ettore, present my respects to the countess and your daughter."

"Thanks, and convey mine to Signorina Adele. That dear, beautiful girl! There have been so many enquiries after her during these twenty days!"

"Oh, I am sure of it, I am sure of it; we are such favourites. Don Ettore, I am really delighted to have met you."

And Signor Prospero escaped with an

agility seemingly impossible with his rotundity.

"The devil take Gentili!" exclaimed Count Gamberini, seeing him slip away, as lively and gay as a fish who has taken the bait without the hook. "Was he not laughing at me? And after the fine adventure at the convent of fools! What presumption! But these upstarts think because they are millionaires they may do anything."

With these reflections, from which you can argue that the Gamberini's earldom was not worth a million, the count recovered from Signor Prospero's ridicule. The latter, after all, had no intention of ridiculing anyone, but simply of showing himself to be proof against the calumnious assaults of Castelnuovo Bedonia.

"If you all think you are going to catch me in turn you are mistaken!" he said to himself. "I am not an eagle, it is true; but neither am I an ostrich to swallow everything. How-

ever, laugh at us if you like. We have a dowry of two millions, and can better afford to laugh than you. Well, the devil take the Gamberinis, and we will go to the Sub-Prefect. Poor Cavaliere! How pleased he will be to see me! Our escapade had quite spoiled all his plans. But now— Now he will receive good news, to restore his courage. Not exactly news, no. But it is for him to put a construction on our return. As for me, I give him my consent *in formis et modis.* Adelina a duchess! Really no woman is better fitted to wear the coronet than she is. Gentlemen, her Grace the Duchess of Francavilla, niece of Commendatore Gentili. How sweetly sounds this title of Commendatore! Cavaliere sounds less so; it is rather common, vulgar! It is tolerable, that is all; but it does not arrest people's attention. Signor Prospero! come, I say, Signor Prospero, calm yourself! Here we are."

Signor Prospero was just entering the

Castle. On reaching the Sub-Prefect's ante-chamber, he sent in his name, and hardly had the porter pronounced it than he could hear a cry of delight in the sanctuary of the political authority of Castelnuovo.

"Come in, come in, Signor Prospero," said the Sub-Prefect, appearing at the threshold, without giving the porter time to introduce the visitor. "So you have come back at last!"

"I have come back, as you perceive."

And questioned by the Sub-Prefect, Signor Prospero Gentili related as far as he knew, the reasons of his niece's sudden determination.

"Ah! did I not tell you so, Signor Prospero? Leave it to me; I will speak to this prior of fools, and I will arrange everything."

"You are a great man, Commendatore," replied Signor Prospero. "Yes, allow me to say so, a great man. Were it not for you, heaven only knows how much longer I should

have had to do penance in the desert. Not that our companions were disagreeable; Oh no! Good people, those fools; and they were all very fond of me. I shall always remember their kindness, and shall make them a present of all my books for their library. For that matter I have never read them, and certainly shall not begin to do so now."

"You will do well," said the Sub-Prefect, "to put an end to that digression. And now tell me, have you already spoken to the Duke?"

"No, not yet. We arrived late last night."

"Don't lose any time, for heaven's sake. The moment is propitious. To-morrow evening I will, if convenient, pay you a visit. If you wink at me it will be a sign that you have been successful."

"And then you will support me, will you not?"

"Bravo! You interpret my thoughts, Commendatore Prospero, we must succeed."

That same day, as soon as Signor Prospero had taken his leave, the Sub-Prefect sat down and wrote to the Home Secretary. This was the tenor of the letter—

"Your Excellency,

"I have not written for some weeks, and his grace, the Duke of Francavilla, will have made my apology, and explained to you the reason of my silence. Certain persons had gone away, giving me to understand that they must make some preparations for the great event. But at Turin the uncle fell ill, and this contretemps has caused the delay of a month. At length they returned yesterday and I hasten to inform your Excellency thereof, being well aware of the important political and social reasons which lead the new Count di Cavour to take note even of this trifling event. Permit me to say all I think. In others and speaking to others, it might seem like flattery; but I think the present case excludes this suspicion. Besides, I pride

myself on my frankness, though in former days, God be praised for ever past, this quality was the cause of many disappointments to me.

"But enough of that, and your Excellency will forgive my thus giving vent to my feelings. There are wounds which every now and then re-open and bleed afresh. Our Duke has adapted himself to this provincial life with admirable patience, and his affability has charmed everyone."

Then followed compliments and assurances of devotion, which may be omitted for the sake of brevity.

For the same reason we will skip a day occupied by Signor Prospero in walking about the streets of Castelnuovo, and by Signorina Adele Ruzzani, in receiving visits, and they were not all from inhabitants of the place mind. On the contrary, there were five or six. But let us also leave these alone, and come to the last, who will interest us much more. Judge for yourselves.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Signorina Adele Ruzzani did not seem very well pleased with herself or with the world. The world, as you know, is all that we have around us, and is more often called the little world. But as even the great world is often a very miserable thing, we will let the phrase stand just as it issued from the pen.

Discontented with herself and with the world, Signorina Adele Ruzzani took up a book to read a couple of pages, and then throw it aside; she began her embroidery and stopped at the first chain stitches; she wished to paint, and the desire vanished before she had prepared her palates; in fact she was bored, bored to death, and began to feel a wish to leave Castelnuovo.

At that moment the servant entered.

"A visitor, Signorina."

"Who is it? Some more tiresome people?"

"I do not know," answered the Ruzzani's old servant, suppressing a smile. "This is the name."

Thus saying he handed his mistress a card. Adele Ruzzani (what a pity that we cannot any longer call her the little monk, or the fair-haired seraph) took the card, glanced at it rapidly, and uttered a cry, a little cry which seemed like astonishment, but might be joy.

Let us also glance at it. Underneath a count's coronet (nine little pearls in full view which signified a circle of sixteen) was the name of Valentino Gualandi del Poggio, inscribed in delicate characters in italics; and lower down another name added in pencil, *Anacleto.*

The card bore no sign of having been folded.

"Have you shown the gentleman in?" asked the young girl.

"In the drawing-room like the others," answered the servant.

"Very well; you may go, and as soon as my uncle comes in, tell him that Father—Signor Anacleto wishes to see him."

When the servant had left the room, Adele Ruzzani ran to the looking-glass. Her face was crimson: therefore she was obliged to remain there, waiting for this emotion to subside, and striving with her hands to repress the flutterings of her heart. She smiled meanwhile a happy, weary smile. Weariness and happiness are more nearly related than one would imagine at first sight. Is not happiness a sense of languor of our faculties?

When Signorina Ruzzani entered the drawing-room, she saw Count Gualandi standing in front of a canvas, which rested on its easel in the recess of a window. It was a study very familiar to him, because it was begun a fortnight before at the convent of San Bruno, and represented the interior of the cloister.

At the rustling of her gown, Count Gualandi turned round, and Signorina Adele recognised the handsome prior of San Bruno,

less grave in appearance, more comely in his bearing, yet still severe, and in accordance with that type of dignity and strength which should never be separated from the idea of manhood.

He, meanwhile, saw no longer the little monk, but a beautiful, graceful maiden. The mischievous expression of a schoolboy in holiday time had vanished, but the expression of a woman who feels and thinks, rendered her countenance more attractive than before.

"Count," she stammered, going towards him.

"Signorina, here I am," he replied, concealing his deep emotion by a profound bow.

A mute scene followed, which lasted perhaps a minute. That minute seemed like a century.

"Then," resumed Signorina Adele, "you have been kind enough to remember your promise?"

"As soon as I was able; forty-eight hours afterwards," said Count Gualandi.

"Here I am without employment, Signorina; dismissed from my priorship."

"Indeed?"

"Most certainly, and the convent of San Bruno is suppressed."

"Poor convent! It was so nice there!"

"Do you regret it, Signorina?"

"Of course; do we not owe some gratitude to the places in which we have passed hours of happiness?"

"Thanks;" murmured Count Gualandi.

"For the convent?" inquired Signorina Adele shrewdly; she was recovering her self-possession.

"For the convent and for myself," answered the Count. "Was I not its prior, and did I not represent it in the eyes of the world? Poor community of San Bruno!" he continued, seating himself in the easy-chair, to which Signorina Adele had motioned

him, near the sofa on which she was resting.

"We dissolved it the day before yesterday."

"Immediately after our departure; so I was told," observed Adele.

"Ah, did you know it? Then news from Monte Acuto reaches Castelnuovo with the rapidity of lightning? And there are no telegraph wires that I am aware of."

"What do you mean, Count? There has been time enough for the news to travel on foot. Your monks brought me the information between yesterday and to-day."

"Indeed? My monks?"

"Certainly. Yesterday Signor Mario Novelli and Signor Pellegrino della Rosa—that is to say, Father Agapito and Father Ilarione. Then this morning Signor Ariodonte Soresi and Signor Nello Altoviti, who, if I am not puzzled amongst so many names, represent Fathers Restituto and Bonaventura. Now I was expecting also Father An-

selmo, Father Tranquillo, and the few others with whom I found favour," said Signorina Adele, modestly lowering her eyes.

"At this rate you will see all the fourteen appear," answered Count Gualandi. "Indeed they have lost no time! And they surely came to pay their respects to you before leaving the province," he added, evidently trying to feel his ground. "Signor Novelli at the head of the list to remind you of his wreath of fiammole."

"Of course," interrupted Signorina Adele. "Just so."

Count Gualandi was on the point of replying, but he was prevented by Signor Prospero's arrival. I leave you to imagine the welcome he gave the ex-prior of San Bruno, although, to say the truth, this visit pleased him about as much as smoke in his eyes would have done.

"He too!" Signor Prospero had muttered, when he heard in the ante-room that Count

Gualandi had arrived. "Does the convent of fools intend to empty itself in our house? And we who had succeeded in escaping from it! And my dear niece who seemed so glad to get away!"

This was the monologue. Meanwhile one must be courteous, swallow all that was bitter, and give out the sweetness. Poor Signor Prospero!

"You will spend the day with us, won't you?" said Signorina Adele, willingly speaking in her uncle's name now he was present. "Where are you staying?"

"At the *Cross of Malta*," answered the Count. "And now I understand why the proprietor was unable to give me a room worthy of me, as he was pleased to say. All my excellent companions must be at the *Cross of Malta*."

"Of course," put in Signor Prospero. "First come first served."

"Ah, I should not like the proverb to

prove true," replied Count Gualandi, in a more melancholy tone than was justified by that little misfortune at the hotel.

"We would gladly offer you hospitality," replied Signorina Adele, pretending not to understand the allusion. "But really a young man like you— It is all very well our being your guests up yonder, but the charitable souls of Castelnuovo are not aware of the obligations under which we are to you," she added with adorable gracefulness. "However, you will stay to dinner; that is settled; we will not listen to any excuses."

"Seraph!" murmured the ex-prior.

The seraph looked at him, half smiling, half angry, putting a finger on her lips. What a tiny finger, my readers! The prior looked as though he would like to bite it. To pass the time till dinner, the hosts showed their visitor the garden. The Ruzzani's palace was one of the principal mansions in San Michele Street at the foot of the old town;

therefore there was a great deal of open space at the back—garden, hothouse, aviary, and even a tiny wood.

Two hours passed like lightning. Father Anacleto thought he must have forgotten something in judging life so severely as he had done, and that it was not all vexation and trial.

Uncle Prospero had gone away to attend to some household matter. Adele Ruzzani and Count Gualandi had returned to the drawing-room.

"Signorina," said the Count, trying to resume the interrupted conversation, "may I ask—"

"What?" said Adele laughing.

"What all those unfrocked monks came for?"

"What for? Can you not guess?"

"I, no, unless you help me."

"I must come to your assistance then. They came one after the other to ask— But

no; I must not tell you this. You must imagine it, and I am not foolish enough to believe that you did not guess at once."

"No, I assure you I had not guessed," answered Count Gualandi, disconcerted by that sort of reproach. "I might easily conjecture the reason of their arrival in Castelnuovo. They talked enough about it up yonder. But I could never have imagined that they would dare to come and ask your hand, for instance, alone, without being accompanied by some relation, some serious and respectable person, as the customs of good breeding certainly require."

"Ah, I know custom requires many things," replied Signorina Adele, half seriously, half facetiously; "but perhaps our friends thought that a certain novice was the first to forget those customs by daring to set foot in San Bruno."

"Did you forgive them for that reason?" inquired Count Gualandi anxiously.

"Just so. I could not do otherwise after having set such a bad example."

And the little vixen laughed as she gave the poor Count this information, but it inspired him with the courage of a lion.

Count Gualandi rose, drew back a couple of steps, and good-humouredly cutting the matter short, thus spoke with ceremonious gravity—

"Signorina, I might have come to Castelnuovo yesterday, but I thought it too soon. I might have come to-morrow, but I could not wait so long. You must know that only the day before yesterday evening I telegraphed to Ferrara to my aged cousin, Marquis Gherardo Nelli, begging him to come immediately to Castelnuovo. He ought to have arrived this morning, and I should have begged him to ask your hand in marriage for me. But since the others have put aside conventionalities, and you forgive them, I trust that to-day you will also forgive me.

Signorina Adele, this divine hand"—and thus speaking his voice trembled, while he strove respectfully to take her hand—"this divine hand I have the honour of asking in person."

"The divine hand withdraws—to the council chamber," answered Signorina Adele, with a malicious smile which reminded one of the little fair-haired monk. "The answer shall be given to-morrow to Marquis Gherardo Nelli, who will be welcome."

Father Anacleto— Bother the force of habit! That word is always on my lips. Let us say then that Count Gualandi del Poggio that day had a foretaste of eternal joys.

This excuses me from speaking of the dinner—a matter altogether material, and not worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as those ethereal delights. Besides, if I were to relate every detail, I should have sufficient matter for another volume, and beware! things spun out become tedious.

I will rather narrate how that evening, whilst Signor Prospero was looking over the newspaper and our young people were speaking of trifles, putting into them that deep and hidden meaning which can be put even into trifles, the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo appeared—an expected but by no means welcome visitor. Signor Prospero, who remembered his agreement, was at his wits' end, and in the depths of his heart sent to the devil Count Gualandi, the Sub-Prefect, the Duke of Francavilla, the Home Secretary, the Commende and Commendatori, his niece's whims, his own vanity, and he who was the cause of it.

"Signorina," said the gallant Sub-Prefect, after the usual compliments had been exchanged, "we could not live any longer without you. Your presence is necessary to Castelnuovo. We were on the point of protesting against Turin, who had robbed us of you."

"Oh, I have not been so far," answered Signorina Adele.

"Indeed! Where have you been then?"

"Signor Cavaliere, you ought to guess. Is it not your duty to know everything?"

"Certainly—certainly I know everything," replied the Sub-Prefect, feeling the hit, and trying to be witty; "but indeed in this case I am not sure how much you would like me to know."

"You are very kind," replied Signorina Adele, "but you have the right to know everything. Forgive me if meanwhile, confused by your compliments, I have not introduced you. Really it is my uncle's place to do so, but you are too good to pay attention to these trifles. Signor Cavaliere," she added, modestly indicating her young neighbour, "I have the honour of introducing Count Gualandi del Poggio of Ferrara, my betrothed."

A dumb scene ensued, and gestures of

surprise. First of all, Count Gualandi thought he saw heaven opening to shower on him a profusion of roses and perfumes; Signor Prospero called to mind the Arctic Pole and the Equator, which seemed as nothing in comparison with that sudden flight; the Cavaliere Sub-Prefect saw an abyss in front of him which was swallowing up his Commenda and his Prefecture.

"I congratulate you," he stammered, obeying the obligations of conversation. "I have already had the pleasure of meeting you under different circumstances, which really did not permit me to hope. . . . My lord Count, you are a happy man."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Count Gualandi, shaking hands with the Sub-Prefect. "You interpret my feelings."

And he looked at Signorina Adele as if to convey his gratitude to her by his words to the Sub-Prefect.

The beautiful vixen lowered her eyes and

bit her lips, for she felt very much inclined to laugh.

Before taking his leave, the Sub-Prefect found means to draw aside Signor Prospero, who tried in vain to escape by clinging to the young people.

"You will give me an explanation later, Signor Prospero," he said, glaring at him as if he would thereby nail him to the wall.

"What am I to explain?" retorted the other writhing. "With my niece one never knows what is going to happen next. This, for instance, is a blow which falls on me as well as on you."

"But you, in the name of heaven—"

And he was on the point of saying more, because really our Sub-Prefect was completely puzzled. But a silvery voice cut him short.

"Signor Cavaliere, come here," said Signorina Adele. "Come and give me your opinion on this sketch."

"Oh, it is beautiful!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect, after having glanced at the canvas, which was placed on the easel in the recess of the window. "What is it?"

"The cloisters of the convent of fools," answered Count Valentino smiling.

"Is it an idiosyncrasy in our province?" added the Sub-Prefect, also laughing ironically.

"Alas, an idiosyncrasy come to grief," replied Count Valentino.

"Come to grief? And why?"

"Because the community of San Bruno is dissolved."

"For what reason?"

"Well you might guess. A woman having effected an entrance there, she turned everything upside down, beginning with the hearts. Do you not think it a fine stroke, Cavaliere? At any rate, you ought to be glad of it."

"I? and pray why?"

"Of course, was it not contrary to our constitution? Our lay convent was a bad example, treachery towards society. They are your own words; do you not remember?"

"Yes, yes, I remember them; and also your answers, which you seemed to consider overwhelming the other day."

"They seemed so to me," he replied. "And in that word everything is said. In short, you and I were discussing principles, we remained in the lofty regions of philosophy. A woman brave and charming came with arguments of quite another kind. She appeared and conquered without fighting."

"I congratulate you," said the Sub-Prefect, turning to Signorina Ruzzani. "And I also tender my thanks in the name of society avenged."

The poor Cavaliere was in a sad plight. There was nothing for it but patience. With patience, as Horatius Flaccus says, one learns to support the inevitable.

The worst of it was that things had to be made square with two people at once ; one of less importance but nearer, viz., the Duke of Francavilla, who had hitherto been obliged to content himself with gossip; the other farther off, but placed at the head of Government, and from whom the Cavaliere Sub-Prefect expected promotion or commenda. Alas, both commenda and promotion were fading farther and farther from his sight.

Like a wise man who knows how to wait for a good inspiration, the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo put off his conversation with the Duke of Francavilla to the following day; but he wrote to the minister that same day, endorsing the idea with which the happy prior of San Bruno had just in time inspired him. *Salutem ex inimicis nostris*, as it is in Latin. Judge for yourselves, my readers, from what he wrote to the minister, whether our excellent Cavaliere made use of it by appropriating his enemy's inspiration.

"YOUR EXCELLENCY,

"The pleasantest dream of my life has vanished, as is too often the case with all dreams. And that would not distress me so much, were it not that the fond hope I had cherished of seconding, according to my feeble capacities, one of your Excellency's important schemes, has come to nothing. Everything was arranged for the Duke's marriage, but Fate has suddenly defeated us with one of those unforeseen and unavoidable strokes which influence human combinations to so large an extent. Perhaps considering the matter from a general point of view we might say it is best so. But in this light it may be considered by the Duke, who will not lack opportunities of illustrious alliances and who possesses as many claims to deserve the happiness of domestic life as to obtain the triumphs of public life. Meantime, in spite of the failure of our design, I may comfort myself with having saved your

dignity. Your name has not been compromised; this is all that is essential. The good Duke is much esteemed here, in great request and a general favourite. The first society in Castelnuovo would be proud to ally itself with him. If your Excellency wishes me to carry on the negotiation in a different direction, a combination might be effected with the Gamberini family. There is an only daughter worthy to adorn the capital. True, they are not so rich as the Ruzzanis, but they can claim fourteen generations of noble blood. They have been Counts for more than 300 years. A Gamberini was one of the most renowned captains of Braccio da Montone and then of Francesco Sforza, as your Excellency may find in the genealogies of the Litta. The Gamberinis have given two cardinals to the Church and a famous colonel to Austria in the war against the Turks under that daring hero Marshal Laudon. I am quite aware that this will fall

short of your Excellency's lofty conception, but what is to be done? It is not my fault if, with the best will in the world, I have not been successful. The illustrious statesman to whom I have the honour of writing, knows me, knows the little I am worth, and will render me full justice.

"I have been more fortunate in another matter, which was not among the least important in this province, and which might have become very injurious to civil society where, it was to be feared, the example might find many imitators. A lay convent had been founded a few years ago in the ancient monastery of San Bruno about two hours' journey from Castelnuovo. There were sixteen friars, all men of good family and position, who had foolishly invented for themselves a cloisteral life, thereby depriving their country of so many profitable members, and threatening by this example to deprive it of many more. Your Excellency is not

ignorant of the fact that certain moral diseases are even more infectious than physical ones. Being persuaded of the truth of this, and being fully aware of the great responsibility which weighed on me, I have endeavoured for more than a year to eradicate this great evil. The law did not furnish me with arms ; in philosophy I found no pretext. I have had recourse to stratagem as far as honourable warfare permitted ; I have brought the irresistible forces of nature to bear on that obstinate community of misanthropes. And the day before yesterday the lay convent of San Bruno was dissolved without the slightest detriment to the dignity of government. Owing to my suggestions, the new recluses, before separating, resolved to present the convent to the Society of Good Works of Castelnuovo ; and just an hour ago some of them, revering in my person the representative of government, brought me this most welcome information.

"I flatter myself that I have thus interpreted one of your Excellency's wishes which I make it my respectful care to study in all your acts which are impressed with that lofty understanding and that subtle foresight which aims in the future as much as in the present to obtain for Italy that illustrious place which it has a right to claim at the banquet of nations."

Even to the banquet of nations! The Cavaliere had studied the best authors of the day, and the instruments of rhetoric were familiar enough to him. But alas! this time rhetoric was not to be of much use. Having written this confidential letter to the minister he had despatched another to the Prefect of the province, his immediate chief, magnifying the affair of the dissolution already mentioned, and asking clearly enough for a civic wreath. The commenda, you must understand, which is a wreath to wear round one's neck. But his Excellency the Home Secre-

tary did not consider that by the dissolution of the San Bruno community, the Sub-Prefect of Castelnuovo had done enough for society, and decreed him only the cross of knighthood. He already possessed that of the Crown of Italy; they sent him that of Saints Maurice and Lazarus. He received this dignity, which did not raise him one step in the equestrian order, a month after the letters over which perhaps I have detained you longer than necessary. And Signor Prospero, who was not even on the first step of the ladder, but who ought at least to have received the honour of knighthood before his niece's wedding, found time to go and condole with him.

"They were very wrong not to send you the commenda," he said to him. "But at least we shall have the satisfaction of calling you—*bis* Cavaliere."

Confess, kind readers, that the joke though not meant unkindly, was in the worst taste.

Cavaliere Tiraquelli straightway lost his temper.

"Do you know what you deserve Signor Prospero?" he cried. "To go—to go—where you can easily imagine I wish to send you."

Signor Prospero who had not the slightest idea of having hurt his feelings, stared at this sudden outburst.

"What is the matter? are you offended? One trial more or less is nothing to make such a fuss about."

"I take it as it was meant. And I have enough trials, especially when I think of the one you were the cause of."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Is it not through you that all these misfortunes have happened? The poor Duke of Francavilla quitted Castelnuovo in a state of exasperation. And to think that you might have been allied with the highest nobility of Italy! A Francavilla! Gualandi del Poggio indeed! A Francavilla would have

conferred an honour on you by accepting your millions."

"Thanks for your condescension!" said Signor Prospero bowing. "However, Signor Cavaliere, if my niece would not hear of him, what could I do?"

"Of course, this is your excuse. As if you were not the more to blame by your want of authority? And you actually wanted to be made Commendatore?"

"Gently, Signor Cavaliere, gently! It was not I who wanted it, but you who offered it." replied Signor Prospero with great dignity. "I asked nothing, and now I think of it, it seems to me that I have no claim whatever on Government. Do you know, Signor Cavaliere, sometimes I think about it and say to myself: Friend Prospero, who are you, pray, and what have you done to become ambitious? Are you not already one of the favoured of the world? Having reached the age of fifty-five, without infirmities, without

needs, without wife and without associations in your career, what more do you want? What else do you ask of Fortune? Is it not better to be amongst those who are happy than to be numbered amongst the influential. You come and go, you travel about and you stay in any place you like, the money you spend is your own, you have no account to render to anyone of what you lay out, or of the caprices you satisfy. No, Prospero, my friend, you have no right to complain of Fate and much less to expect honours for the sole reason that God has placed you in a position to live free from cares in this vale of tears. What can you expect from Government? Yes, one thing you may and ought to expect from it; that it should maintain a contingent of ten Carabineers for your country, five infantry and five cavalry. Carabineers on horseback look extremely well! This is an order of Knighthood which is worth something and the Government will do well to be lavish with

it towards its people. All the rest is merely show, false gold, toadying. Excuse me, Signor Cavaliere, I speak as one not holding that rank. But I swear that did I hold it, I should say exactly the same thing."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Sub-Prefect, accompanying his words with a sardonic grin. "You are a fortunate citizen, but I am a Government official, one of those poor soldiers on duty, who watch over the security and the tranquillity of their merry companions. I have need of authority; of favour above, of prestige below. If I could only get away from here! But this seems farther off than ever. I shall have another two years of this Sub-Prefecture if God and Parliament do not overthrow the ministry."

"Let us pray God and Parliament to concede us this grace," answered Signor Prospero Gentili. "Do you wish me to bring about an interregnum as you desire?"

I will not relate the remainder of that melancholy conversation, for it is not necessary to my tale. Besides, my story is finished. Some weeks afterwards the Gualandi-Ruzzani wedding was celebrated, and the happy pair were making preparations for a long journey half way between the Equator and the Arctic Pole. Before leaving Castelnuovo Bedonia, they wished to make an excursion. Guess where? To the convent of San Bruno.

It was a lovely September day. If we were at the beginning of the book I would describe it. We are at the last page, and this saves you from a long piece of prose.

The convent was deserted, but it was sufficiently stocked with mutual reminiscences for our hero and heroine. However, they were there, and for the moment there was no need of apparitions to give life to the scene. The few relations and friends who had accompanied the happy pair were only too much in the way.

"Beloved haunts!" murmured the bridegroom in her ear, as they wandered through the garden. "At this crossway, beautiful seraph, we fought after your departure."

"A duel," she exclaimed, clinging closer to Valentino's side.

"Almost," answered the Count, in his turn pressing the fair-haired seraph's trembling arm.

He or she, for it is all the same, was in the act of drawing nearer to give him a kiss, but paused half way. A tiresome third person was present, a friend, a companion of former days, whose presence Count Gualandi had desired as witness of the nuptial ceremony. Suppose he was the narrator of this poor tale, and you will not be far from the truth.

While the bride and bridegroom were running here and there, exploring all the recesses of the convent, and evoking one by one its sweet memories, the poor witness had gone to sit down under the arcades of the

cloister, and had remained absorbed in profound meditation.

"What a pity!" he exclaimed all at once, without paying attention to the fact that he was thinking out loud. "After all, I should like very well to be in this solitary place, to continue the life which he has not had the constancy to pursue. And I swear to heaven that no little fair-haired monk—"

"Do not swear!" interrupted a beautiful silvery voice. "Sooner or later there is always the risk of regretting it."

FINIS.